Editors' foreword

This is the eighth symposium in the ACP series 'Chemical pathology in relation to clinical medicine' organised by the Committee on Chemical Pathology, whose chairman on this occasion was Dr Colin Hobbs. The choice of the topic needs no defence, for in recent years research on the hypothalamic hormones has disclosed a remarkable pattern of pituitary control. Moreover, these hormones, being small molecules, have proved relatively easy to synthesise. Current knowledge makes it possible to use them for both diagnosis and treatment, though their therapeutic field is not fully established.

New methods for assaying pituitary and other hormones in plasma have revolutionised clinical endocrinology. Through the creation of the Supra-regional Assay Service these assays are available to even the smallest hospital. However, the load on SAS laboratories is already becoming very heavy. Since the supply of reagents is still a problem for some assays specimens should be referred to a laboratory only when the answer will clearly be clinically useful. The information so well presented in this symposium should then ensure a high standard of clinical application of the results.

For some tests there may be discrepancies among the results from different SAS laboratories. The situation will not be entirely satisfactory until national quality control schemes have been set up for all such assays and there is an acceptable uniformity of accuracy and precision.

We should like to thank, on behalf of the Association of Clinical Pathologists, Professor John Landon for securing such an excellent team of speakers and for chairing the symposium, Dr C. B. Hobbs and his committee for the organisation, and the Royal Society of Medicine for allowing the symposium to be held on its premises.

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