

Preface

Rheumatic diseases, in general, are of unknown pathogenic origin. Until recently the mainstay in their treatment has been the use of general measures without specificity. Such drugs as prednisone were used in the treatment of most of the diseases to suppress the inflammatory process and a usually overactive immune system. The effect was nonspecific and the side effects were often life-threatening. In the field of such degenerative rheumatic diseases as osteoarthritis, nonspecific anti-inflammatory drugs have been used with minimal benefit and numerous side effects.

During the last two decades, enormous progress has been made in the understanding of the molecular and cellular processes that lead to disease pathology. Several biochemical steps have been identified in most of the systemic diseases and the involved cells have been characterized. The complexities of the immune system have been better understood and the aberrations that lead to autoimmunity have been clarified significantly.

During the last decade rheumatologists have capitalized on the knowledge gained and have begun to develop new treatment modalities designed to interrupt particular pathologic processes in the hope that, by reversing the aberration, clinical improvement will ensue. This approach has enjoyed frequent success. As a consequence, a number of novel biologics and drugs have recently been introduced in the treatment of rheumatic diseases and many more are in clinical trials. These new therapeutic modalities have already changed the way we think about rheumatic diseases and have markedly increased our ability to help suffering patients. The pace of development of these novel drugs is also increasing and a continuous surge of new biologics and drugs that will claim better clinical efficacy, more specificity, and less toxicity seems likely.

Modern Therapeutics in Rheumatic Diseases aims to synthesize this developing knowledge and present it concisely to all those treating rheumatic patients. Without ignoring what is currently standard treatment, it will present, in practical detail, novel treatments and will discuss those that are in clinical trials and about to be introduced in the rheumatology practice. *Modern*

Therapeutics in Rheumatic Diseases provides a single volume, compiled by experts, where this important information can be accessed.

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