
PREFACE

Diseases of the pancreas have been extremely difficult to study. Until relatively recently, the pancreas was viewed by surgeons as an organ to be avoided, given its deep retroperitoneal location and the sometimes severe consequences of manipulation. Similar difficulties have plagued careful study of the pancreas. In humans, only infrequently have we had the opportunity to evaluate the evolution of diseases of the pancreas; instead, we are confronted with end-stage chronic pancreatitis or acute pancreatitis with extensive necrosis of the gland.

Within the past decade, revolutionary techniques in molecular biology, genetics, and animal models have begun to give us dramatic new insights into pancreatic disease. Coupled with these advances has been a slow but steady progress in the development of our clinical tools for diagnosing and treating pancreatic diseases. These advances place us on the threshold of a much more complete understanding of pancreatic diseases, opening up new opportunities for novel therapies and preventive measures.

Pancreatitis and Its Complications brings together many of the world's experts in pancreatic diseases. These "pancreatologists" include basic scientists, endoscopists, gastroenterologists, and surgeons. The chapters have been organized to provide a comprehensive discussion of acute and chronic pancreatitis, with up-to-date discussions of pathophysiology, epidemiology, diagnostic strategies, treatment, and complications of disease. It is hoped that this text will serve as a useful reference for clinicians as well as provide a clinical background for scientists with an interest in pancreatic or related diseases.

I would like to thank all the contributors for their outstanding contributions and the staff at Humana Press for its superbly competent support.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-1-58829-179-0>

Pancreatitis and Its Complications

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2005, X, 338 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-58829-179-0

A product of Humana Press