Preface

As illustrated by the chapters in this book, autoimmune disorders are diverse and the same. At the heart of these diseases are specific alleles of genes of the major histocompatibility complex favoring the targeting of specific antigens, with diseases differing in the specific alleles favoring or preventing autoimmunity. The fine balance between self tolerance and autoimmunity is upset by major mutations in a few families, and multiple polymorphisms in most families. Large scale genetic (research involving the screening of hundreds of thousands of newborns) and then immunologic prediction of many autoimmune disorders is now a reality for both families and the general population. With the exception of celiac disease, environmental factors essential for disease and contributing to the marked increase in many of these disorders are undefined. Despite our lack of comprehensive knowledge, multiple immunotherapeutic clinical trials are underway. It is my hope that our current knowledge base for Immunoendocrinology presented here will prove sufficient to design and test preventive paradigms. Nevertheless, it is my belief that our current basic research knowledge, also presented here, is insufficient to be assured of disease prevention with current trials. Contained within each of the chapters are incomplete drafts of maps that should eventually lead to disease prevention for specific disorders that in combination provide a comprehensive draft of our knowledge and ignorance of the continent of autoimmunity.

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