

Preface

Cardiovascular disease is an enormous problem in industrialized nations. Despite a declining incidence, an estimated 70 million Americans have some form of cardiovascular disease, which takes more than 830,000 lives and prompts 6,200,000 hospital admissions each year. Given the aging of the population and the challenges in risk factor management, these numbers are more likely to increase than decrease. In fact, better management of acute phases has led to an increased number of patients with chronic manifestations of cardiovascular disease.

The response has been a prodigious effort on all fronts. Classic cardiovascular research encompasses physiology and pharmacology, but has now grown to include genetics, genomics, epidemiology, molecular biology, developmental biology, and biophysics, bioengineering, and information technology, all of which are taking advantage of an impressive and ever-increasing set of sophisticated investigational tools. Old paradigms are under constant assault from a barrage of new information. Clinical research has developed just as quickly, generating a voluminous body of trial data that seems to grow exponentially.

All of this poses its own set of problems for practitioners, in particular those without subspecialty training in cardiovascular disease. The rate of advance of clinical cardiology continues to accelerate, with new pathophysiologic models, new imaging technologies, and new therapies. Meanwhile, the volume of cardiac patients, particularly in the hospital setting, is increasing.

With all of this in mind, we offer up this short volume, neither exhaustive nor all-encompassing, but designed to be clear and concise. We hope to promote understanding of basic mechanisms underlying disease states, since these provide the rationales for treatment strategies. The emphasis, however, is on delineating practical

techniques for evaluation and treatment of patients with cardiovascular problems. Along the same lines, references are not meant to be comprehensive but to point the reader to the most useful sources of additional information. Our goal is to provide a fast and effective way for practitioners to identify important concepts and information that they can use to deliver more effective patient care.

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