
Vitiligo

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Vitiligo

 Springer

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Preface

Vitiligo has been, until recently, a rather neglected area in dermatology and medicine. Patients complain about this situation, which has offered avenues to quacks, and has led to the near orphan status of the disease. The apparently, simple and poorly symptomatic presentation of the disease has been a strong disadvantage to its study, as compared to other common chronic skin disorders such as psoriasis and atopic dermatitis. Vitiligo is still considered by doctors as a non disease, a simple aesthetic problem. A good skin-based angle of attack is also lacking because generalized vitiligo is clearly epitomizing the view of skin diseases as simple targets of a systemic unknown dysregulation (diathesis), reflecting the Hippocratic doctrine. This view has mostly restricted vitiligo to the manifestation of an auto-immune diathesis in the past 30 years. Thus, skin events, which are easily detected using skin biopsies in most other situations, have not been precisely recorded, with the argument that a clinical diagnosis was sufficient for the management (or most commonly absence of management) of the patient.

This book is an international effort to summarize the information gathered about this disorder at the clinical, pathophysiological and therapeutic levels. Its primary aim is to bridge current knowledge at the clinical and investigative level, to point to the many unsolved issues, and to delineate future priorities for research. Its impetus was also to provide the best guidelines for integrated patient care, which is currently possible at a very limited number of places around the world, especially for surgical procedures.

A striking feature in the vitiligo field was, until recently, the absence of consensus on definitions, nomenclature, and outcome measures. With a group of European dermatologists, who had a strong interest in vitiligo and pigment cell research, we had launched some years ago, the Vitiligo European Task Force (VETF). The VETF has addressed those issues as a priority. This group, joined by other colleagues from the rest of the world also involved in the vitiligo research community, has communicated its experience in this book. We have tried to pilot the editing of the book according to consistent principles based on discussions held at VETF meetings and international IPCC (international pigment cell conference) workshops. However, some areas remain controversial and we have highlighted the existing conflicting issues and uncertainties.

After reviewing the field, much needs to be done. In particular, besides basic research based on the many hypotheses raised, new unbiased epidemiological, clinical, histopathological, natural history, and therapeutic data are clearly needed. They should be confronted by genetics and other investigative variables to better define the disease and its subsets. We hope that the combined efforts of all participating authors

will prove useful to bring more attention to this field, and we are confident that both the research community (the mystery of melanocyte loss in vitiligo is a true scientific challenge) and the drug industry (the potential market is large) will be stimulated to bring in new treatment strategies to this large number of patients with unmet needs.

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