Lipids:
A Clinicians' Guide

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Foreword

Coronary heart disease is the principal cause of death in all Western countries. Abnormalities in the serum lipids are one of the major risk factors widely recognised as leading to this epidemic of heart disease. These abnormalities occur very commonly in the general community and in general practice, and practitioners are prevailed upon daily to provide specific advice about diet and cholesterol and to interpret chemical estimations.

This is a very emotive area of medicine, one where often the patients most active in seeking advice have the least to gain. On the other hand, there may be young people carrying a severe coronary risk, knowingly or not, who prefer to avoid risk factor intervention. There are strong vested interests in the commercial world who would prefer to overlook any therapeutic value of dietary modification for selected individuals, and others who see great merit in a particular diet. The pharmaceutical industry has a vested interest in the cholesterol story as well. The individual doctor needs to decide for himself whether the cholesterol issue requires action or not, and for this he needs access to up to date and relevant data. This is one of the purposes of this book.

The use of lipid-lowering therapy is usually quite a straightforward exercise for any medical practitioner, once the decision has been taken to initiate it. This book attempts to give the clinician, be he general practitioner, cardiologist, physician or senior medical student, the background information on the subject of lipids, so that he may make a rational decision whether or not to initiate therapy. The book follows a logical sequence of development: key areas of biochemistry are discussed briefly, followed by an exposition of the important clinical implications of abnormal lipid values. Passing reference is made to other important risk factors, but their modification is not discussed in any detail. The evidence to justify risk factor intervention and the treatment of hyperlipidaemia is presented in detail. If the reader is convinced that a case for treatment exists, in general or in particular, then he will find details of diagnosis and management in the final two chapters.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive textbook on the subject of lipids. Several rare or unusual problems have received scant mention or have been omitted, but there are a number of textbooks providing such coverage. It is hoped that this book will function as a practical guide, providing material of use to all branches of the medical profession. The authors do not see any fundamental difference in the role of specialist or general practitioner in regard to diagnosis and management of lipid abnormality. It is acknowledged that in certain countries the availability of key drugs might prevent general practitioners from initiating certain therapy.

The cholesterol field is in turmoil on the subject of units, milligrams or millimoles. All the basic epidemiological research has been published in mg units and all American work continues in this way. More recent non-American work is reported in SI units. The practitioner these days really needs to be conversant with both systems, although it is preferable that SI units only be used. To be consistent with these aims, the authors have presented original results in the units in which they were first published. At times equivalent values have also been provided. For practical purposes, 1 mmol/litre cholesterol is approximately equivalent to 39mg/100ml, while 1 mmol/litre triglyceride is approximately equivalent to 89mg/100ml.

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