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AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES IN PREGNANCY

Foreword

The term "autoimmunity" refers to a mechanism by which an organism mounts an immune response, either humoral or cellular, against one or more of its own body constituents. The term "autoimmune diseases" describes a heterogeneous group of conditions in which the pathophysiologic basis is known or, more often, presumed to involve this process.

None of these diseases is especially common, and some are very rare, yet when they occur as coincidental complications of pregnancy, they can present the clinician with difficult problems in management. One of the reasons they represent dilemmas is their very rarity, such that a single clinician is unlikely to have much experience with diagnosis and management. Additionally, pregnancy and the disease may have reciprocal effects on one another. In other words, the course of the disease may be influenced in either a beneficial or an adverse manner by gestation and pregnancy outcome, and mother and/or fetus may be affected by the underlying disease. Finally, the therapy employed may have special implications for the pregnant woman, particularly with respect to effects on the fetus or newborn child.

Essential to a consideration of autoimmune diseases in pregnancy is a review of the gestational physiologic adjustments involving the immune system. This symposium begins with a thorough and up-to-date summary of this subject. Next presented is a series of eight diseases for which the pathophysiologic basis is believed to involve autoimmunity. For each disease, etiologic, diagnostic, and therapeutic considerations are summarized, along with detailed consideration of the reciprocal effects of pregnancy and the particular condition. The final paper in the symposium is a review of drugs commonly used in treating autoimmune diseases, with particular emphasis on their effects when administered to the pregnant woman.

R.M.P.