

PREFACE



Recent issues of *Immunology and Allergy Clinics of North America* have focused on various aspects of asthma and allergic rhinitis. Yet all too often, atopic dermatitis precedes these other two diseases in the "atopic march." The publication of the first issue of *Immunology and Allergy Clinics of North America* devoted entirely to atopic dermatitis is timely and reflects an appreciation for both the importance and the complexity of this disease.

Atopic dermatitis is a disease that presents a challenge to clinicians and researchers alike. While prevalence of atopic dermatitis has increased similarly to asthma and allergic rhinitis, the global distribution has been found to be distinct in some instances from the other two diseases. In addition, specialists in the fields of Allergy-Immunology and Dermatology have not yet reached a consensus on such critical issues as the definition of *atopy* with respect to this disease or updated diagnostic criteria. On the other hand, the significant impact of atopic dermatitis on patients and their families is increasingly being appreciated and assessment of quality of life is evolving from a research tool into a clinical instrument. Progress also is being made in defining specific triggers and unraveling the complexity of the immune dysregulation central to this disease. Observations made in animal models of atopic dermatitis may provide important insights into human disease processes. Lessons learned in the rapidly advancing clinical and basic research arenas have provided a foundation for refining conventional therapy and developing novel treatments. As expected with a frustrating and chronic disease, a number of unconventional therapeutic modalities have been introduced and require critical assessment.

All of these issues are dealt with in the ensuing articles by an outstanding international faculty of epidemiologists, clinicians, and researchers representing both Allergy-Immunology and Dermatology. I wish to thank all of the authors for generously sharing their knowledge and their time in contributing to this publication. It is my sincere hope that the information in this monograph will contribute directly to improved care of patients with atopic dermatitis and stimulate further research in this important disease.

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