

Introduction

1999 was an important year for respiratory medicine, with significant papers being published over a very wide range of respiratory topics. We have selected, as in previous years, a number of papers (introductory articles) which represent this broad range, and have asked an expert in the field to review the introductory article and to then reflect upon its content in the context of recent relevant literature within that particular area, to allow a general review of the topic.

For some topics we have selected two or even three introductory articles. The authors are invited to be as specific or general as they choose, and to be controversial if they wish. The abstracts of the relevant introductory articles are provided at the beginning of each review.

We have tried to select a balance of topics across a very productive year for respiratory medicine and, as in previous issues, we have tried to avoid topics covered in recent years so that the *Thorax* Year-in-Review will be of cumulative value in covering a wide spectrum of advances in respiratory medicine as the years go by. It is hoped that this issue and back numbers from previous years will be a useful resource for continuing medical education for consultants and for trainees in respiratory medicine.

This year's wide ranging topics include the use of glucocorticoids in exacerbations of COPD, inhaled NO for neonatal respiratory failure, outcome measures in asthma, and a review of several aspects of prophylaxis for pulmonary infections in HIV disease. Sleep medicine remains a rapid growth area and this year there have been several publications of interest which are reviewed. Screening for lung cancer has been a depressing area until recently and an important new study is included. Similarly, desensitisation immunotherapy has been in the doldrums for some time but there is now renewed interest and activity in this subject. There is also growing interest in the relationship between hygiene and allergy, and this is also reviewed. The effect of obesity on pulmonary disease, although common, has been little discussed until recently and again is reflected in this issue. Smoking cessation remains a major challenge and the development of a new agent for this is discussed.

We hope that this year's reviews will make for both enjoyable and educational reading. We are very grateful to all our contributors who have taken time from their busy schedules to write these excellent reviews.

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