

# Introduction

As with previous years we have selected 12 papers published during 1998 in general and respiratory journals which we felt were of major interest or importance. We selected papers in 12 different areas and then asked an expert in each field to review the paper (the introductory article) and to put it in the context of recent relevant literature within that area to provide a general review of the topic. In some areas we have selected two introductory articles for a particular topic. Authors were invited to be as general or as specific as they wished and to be controversial if appropriate. Abstracts of the relevant introductory papers are reproduced at the beginning of each review for the reader's convenience.

1998 was another interesting year for respiratory medicine and making the selection was problematic. We attempted to select a balance of topics across the range of the growing edge of respiratory medicine as well as attempting to select an international spectrum of opinion to write the review articles. We have avoided topics from previous years so that *Thorax Year in Review* will hopefully be of cumulative value in covering a wide spectrum of advances in respiratory medicine as years pass, allowing it to become a useful resource for continuing medical education and respiratory medicine training programmes.

This year's topics focus firstly on several aspects of COPD including the role of rehabilitation programmes, the management of exacerbations at home, and the role of lung reduction surgery. The genetics of cystic fibrosis continues to expand and this is reviewed as well as new information on survival benefit for lung transplantation. Two aspects of pulmonary circulation are reviewed—the continuing attempts to treat primary pulmonary hypertension and recent advances in thromboembolic disease. The role of adjunctive therapy for lung cancer following surgical resection remains controversial and an important meta-analysis is discussed. Tuberculosis continues to be a major global problem with much recent emphasis on directly observed therapy and this is also reviewed. In respiratory epidemiology a highlight of 1998 was the publication of the findings of the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood and these findings are discussed. As respiratory physicians we are frequent prescribers of corticosteroids and may not always think enough about osteoporosis; recent data on this are reviewed. Our selection finishes with a review of the potentially interesting new anti-inflammatory property of macrolide antibiotics.

We hope this year's collection of reviews will make enjoyable and educational reading. We are enormously grateful to all our contributors who have taken time and trouble from their busy schedules to write these excellent reviews.

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