Preface

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is an enormous problem in industrialized nations. Despite a declining incidence, an estimated 70 million Americans have some form of CVD, which causes more than 700,000 deaths and prompts 6.4 million hospital admissions each year. Given the aging of the population and the challenges in risk-factor management, these numbers are more likely to increase than decrease. In fact, better management of acute phases has led to an increased number of patients with chronic manifestations of CVD.

The response has been a prodigious effort on all fronts. Classic cardiovascular research encompasses physiology and pharmacology, but has now grown to include molecular biology, genetics, developmental biology, biophysics, bioengineering, and information technology, all of which are availing themselves of an impressive and ever-increasing set of sophisticated investigational tools. Old paradigms are under constant assault from a barrage of new information. Clinical research has developed just as quickly, generating a voluminous body of trial data that seems to grow exponentially.

All of this poses its own set of problems for practitioners, in particular those without subspecialty training in CVD. The rate of advance of clinical cardiology continues to accelerate, with new pathophysiological models, new imaging technologies, and new therapies. Meanwhile, the volume of cardiac patients, particularly in the hospital setting, is increasing.

With all of this in mind, we offer up this short volume, neither exhaustive nor all encompassing, but designed to be clear and concise. We hope to promote understanding of basic mechanisms underlying disease states because these provide the rationales for treatment strategies. The emphasis, however, is on delineating practical techniques for the evaluation and treatment of patients with cardiovascular problems. Along the same lines, references are not meant to be comprehensive, but to point the reader to the most useful sources of additional information. Our goal is to provide a

fast and effective resource that will help practitioners to identify important concepts and information that they can use to deliver more effective patient care.

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