

Preface

This special issue of *Antiviral Research* is intended to update the status of the clinical use of interferon in viral infections and to provide the biological basis for future applications. Since its discovery by Isaacs and Lindenmann in 1957, interferon has been known as an effective, broad spectrum antiviral agent, that in animal models showed an unprecedented capability to control infection by almost any virus. Moreover, besides being an extraordinarily potent defense mechanism against viral infections, interferon can affect other body functions, such as the immune response, cell differentiation, and the growth of certain tumors. Unfortunately, application in humans was not equally satisfactory and so overenthusiasm readily changed into overskepticism, both to be considered at least premature. In fact the failure to reproduce in man the successful achievements seen in mice reflects the fact that interferon is not a conventional drug, but rather a biological system that may act differently in different species and that must be used in a way that mimics its natural role. As shown by the articles of this special issue this goal has been achieved in various infections while in others the research is providing the basic knowledge for future use. Of course there is still room for debate as to whether interferon did or did not maintain its pledges. Having an optimistic attitude I am sure that it did and will, and that this special issue of *Antiviral Research* will help establish this.

I am particularly grateful to Dr. George Galasso, who had the original idea for this venture and invited me to serve as Guest Editor, to the authors of the various articles, who kindly agreed to invest their valuable time in this demanding endeavor, and to Elsevier for the organizational and financial efforts generously devoted to this special issue.

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