

Foreword

The 'fetal origins of adult disease' hypothesis, first proposed by David Barker (University of Southampton) a decade and a half ago, has now reached general acceptance throughout the medical world. There are an increasing number of medical conditions that reportedly are influenced by retarded fetal development *in utero*, resulting in fetal programming for a life in an energy-sparse environment.

Can programming be set even earlier? What is the evidence to suggest that the 'maternal' pre- and peri-conceptual environment can also lead to significant deviations in fetal development, neo-natal and adult physiology. This has obvious implications in the practice of assisted reproductive technologies (ART), where exogenous gonadotrophin stimulation, gamete manipulation and embryo culture *in vitro* could possibly lead to adverse fetal programming. However, understanding the full consequences of ART on adult health may take many more years to resolve, as the oldest IVF children are themselves just over 20 years of age. This Symposium, sponsored by Serono Symposia, held in Adelaide on October 10, 2004, brought together a wide range of experts in the area of maternal health and welfare, fetal programming, epigenetics, IVF and embryo development to allow participants to develop an informed view of the significance of reproductive technologies influencing subsequent fetal development and health. Our desire is that the publication of our distinguished speaker's presentations will allow more to do the same.

Jeremy Thompson

Chair, Local Organising Committee

'Unravelling fetal programming and the influence of ART'