

Foreword

This symposium was held at the Esplanade Hotel, Fremantle in Western Australia, on 2 November 2003. It was arranged as a satellite symposium to the Fertility Society of Australia's 22nd Annual Scientific Meeting in Perth. The symposium was sponsored by the Australian branch of Serono Symposia International and was designed to educate scientists and health professionals about the latest advances in understanding and treating male infertility.

Effective fertility rates appear to be declining in developed countries. In Australia, the proportions of both men and women who are childless are increasing and while we have an excellent understanding of the causes and treatment of female infertility, a good clinical basic understanding of the causes of infertility in the male has lagged. The international faculty at this meeting was thus charged with providing delegates with new information on male reproductive health seen from a population-wide and evolutionary perspective. The speakers presented information on the clinical and laboratory options for treating male infertility, the genetic, endocrine, biochemical and anatomical basis of male reproductive biology, and gave an evolutionary perspective on human fertility and infertility. There were nine speakers, seven of whom are represented in the publications of this issue.

In order of speakers, Jenny Graves discussed the evolution of the Y chromosome from a comparative vertebrate perspective and presented intriguing evidence on how lack of a pairing partner during meiosis has led it to degeneration. David Cram outlined the genetic screening currently available for the infertile male. Peter Schlegel discussed the causes of azoospermia and demonstrated a new surgical method for harvesting sperm from men with various forms of spermatogenic failure. John Aitken presented the latest thinking on the role of oxidative stress in modulating sperm function. Brian Setchell spoke on his work on the endocrinology of the testis. David Handelsman addressed the contentious issue of 'declining sperm counts' and largely dismissed the evidence. Steven Ward from the University of Hawaii outlined his work on the organization and packing of DNA in the sperm head.

The meeting was attended by 181 delegates. We thank Nicole Grant and Janine Stovold from Serono Symposia International for their expert assistance in running the symposium, and Gordon Baker, David de Kretser, Stephen Junk, Philip Matson, Rob McLachlan and John Tyler for chairing the sessions.

Jim Cummins, Anne Jequier