PREFACE

It is my great pleasure to have the Final Proceedings of the "Lake Shirakaba - Placenta Conference (1993)" published as a supplement of the Endocrine Journal. I sincerely appreciate the efforts of Professor Michio TAKAHASHI, the Editor-in-Chief of the Endocrine Journal and the Principle Organizer of the Conference, and Professor Tsunehisa MAKINO, Head of the Organizing Committee, devoted towards publication of the Proceedings.

The Conference was held between 1989 and 1993 at Lake Shirakaba and Mitsuinomori, Nagano Prefecture. Some 9–15 papers were presented by participants every year.

The characteristics of the Conference are: (i) the Conference is a closed meeting with participation of a relatively small number of invited researchers (ca. 35 per year), (ii) sufficient time is given for every attendant to present a paper and to discuss it in depth with participants, (iii) equal numbers of papers are presented both on clinical medicine and fundamental science to stimulate the exchange of views of both fields and (iv) the Proceedings are published in English every year. The Proceedings of previous Conferences, in 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992, are already published with approximately 12 papers in each volume. The findings reported in these Proceedings are sure to promote progress in both fundamental science and obstetric clinical procedures.

It is well known that the placenta has significant characteristics in obstetrics, namely (i) playing a major role as a potent organ of internal secretion, (ii) an important transfer organ of materials between mother and fetus and (iii) an anatomical and immunological barrier between them. Additionally, an interesting fact is that the life span of the human placenta is limited to approximately 40 weeks, which is identical to the life of the inner zone of fetal adrenal glands. This may suggest that these two endocrine organs play very important roles in maintenance and termination of pregnancy in humans.

Further fundamental research should be conducted on the autonomous regulating mechanisms of placental function (regulation by the autonomous nerve system, endocrinological mechanisms and immunological paracrine or autocrine mechanisms) particularly in relation to the actions of various cytokines and growth factors. Clinically, more efforts should be made to research the etiology of toxemias in relation to placental function and the mechanism of onset of labor in humans. Research in these fields ought to promote preventive management of toxemias, some kinds of miscarriages, over-term pregnancies, and dystocias. The development of medicine for treating placental dysfunction should be realized in the near future.

TETSUYA NAKAYAMA
Guest Professor,
Showa University School of Medicine