



INTRODUCTION

Managing androgen excess: toward longer and better life

EXCESSIVE ANDROGEN activity in women causes unwanted changes in personal appearance, including oily skin, acne, hirsutism, and alopecia. Less frequently there is obesity, acanthosis nigricans, and clinical signs of virilization. Many women also have a history of irregular menses, amenorrhea, infertility, fibrocystic breast disease, and hidradenitis suppurativa, all of which appear to be associated with hyperandrogenemia. A more recent concern has been the association of hyperandrogenemia with lipid abnormalities, early cardiovascular disease, polycystic ovarian disease, and endometrial carcinoma.

Radioimmunoassay testing improved the laboratory identification of androgen excess, and diagnostic accuracy has been further enhanced by techniques such as magnetic resonance imaging. These laboratory and radiologic advances, coupled with renewed interest in the clinical subtleties of androgen excess, have led to early identification and classification of women with this disorder. We can anticipate that more definitive diagnosis and treatment will follow. The result should be improved and prolonged life for these patients, and a better chance to avoid late sequelae such as cardiovascular disease and endometrial cancer.

Management of androgen-excess disorders involves many specialties, including dermatology, gynecology,

and endocrinology. You will find all of these areas of expertise represented in this and the next issues of the *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*, with state-of-the-art reviews of the diagnosis and management of androgen-excess disorders. These papers are the result of the first American symposium on androgen excess, presented at The Cleveland Clinic Foundation in 1987.

In this issue, D.L. Booher, MD, of The Cleveland Clinic Foundation Department of Gynecology, makes a case for aggressive management of postmenopausal symptoms that are related to androgen excess, and David C. Cumming, MD, of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, reviews the process of reproductive maturation and the transition to menopause, and clarifies androgen production and regulation in the normal setting.

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