

Preface

This book had its origin in some of the collaborations that I have enjoyed since unexpectedly gaining an interest in the laboratory assessment of vitamin status 30 years ago. As a student, I had the good fortune to study in the laboratory of Dr. Martin Shearer at Guy's Hospital in London. Dr. Shearer had pioneered the laboratory assessment of vitamin K during the late 1960s and successfully measured the vitamin in plasma at endogenous concentrations for the first time during the 1970s. I soon recognized that his keen attention detail was one key to his considerable success and I am grateful that he recognized my curiosity. I spent happy holidays trying to measure vitamin K properly and mastering the idiosyncrasies of temperamental early generation chromatography systems. With hindsight, overcoming these challenges provided invaluable experiences that I still call on today—little is learnt in a laboratory when all is functioning as it should.

Several decades earlier Guy's Hospital happened to play another role in the vitamin story through the training of the mature student Frederick Hopkins. Sir Frederick Gowland Hopkins went on to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1929, with Christiaan Eijkman for the discovery vitamins, although Casimir Funk, while working in Chelsea is widely credited with the discovery. Casimir Funk's most notable prodigy was Jack Drummond. It was Professor Drummond who coined the word "vitamin" much to the discontentment of his mentor. Tragically Jack, his wife Anne, and their young daughter Elizabeth, will always be remembered as the victims of the infamous "Dominici affair."

After relocating to St. Thomas' Hospital in 1994 I went on to found the Nutristasis Unit and benefitted greatly from quickly making the acquaintance of talented (and now longstanding) colleagues. The Unit is focused on the development and application of novel markers of vitamin status. My colleagues subsequently developed their own areas of interest and I am delighted that several of them have contributed chapters to this book. Other chapters have been contributed by collaborators whose unrelenting generosity in sharing their expertise and time are much appreciated and are representative of the characteristics of so many who work tirelessly to unravel the roles of vitamins.

Since vitamins share little structural similarity with each other a variety of approaches have been required to facilitate their study. Present-day methods for the assessment of vitamin status are products of sequential advances which have been achieved since the beginning of the vitamin story. Many of the available techniques and instrumentation would be unrecognizable to our predecessors.

Laboratory workers spend a great deal of their time investigating the routine. It is to those who recognize and find the time to properly investigate the abnormal that particular credit is due. Recognition of the abnormal is made more probable when those performing laboratory investigations understand the significance and limitations of the tests that they carry out. If this book assists in supporting an improved understanding then it has been a worthwhile endeavor. If it also promotes a curiosity

that furthers the future development of methods for the laboratory assessment of vitamin status then all the better.

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