

Guest editorial

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Perinatal computing: The leading edge

This issue of the Journal of Perinatal Medicine is devoted to a series of 17 papers, which involve several facets of a general subject area which, for many in perinatology, might appear at first blush of peripheral interest — “Perinatal Computing”. These 17 peer reviewed papers were derived from presentations at the First World Symposium on Computers in the Care of the Mother, Fetus and Neonate, held in Vienna, Austria, on 8–12 March '87. At that meeting, there were over 250 papers presented. There were over 400 perinatal scientists from around the world in attendance. The 17 papers included here surely could not and do not represent the entire range of subject matter covered at that meeting, but do represent, in many ways, a series of highlights from the meeting.

It is not our intent in this brief introductory statement to “highlight” the highlights. Suffice it to say that a considerable body of work continues in “classic” perinatal computing, i. e., areas active since the mid 1970s. These include large epidemiologic studies, the use of computerized data bases in support of perinatal studies and clinical care, as well as quality assurance, and computer-assisted fetal monitoring, with a particular focus on computer-assisted study of antepartum fetal behavioral states. A newer area of computerized fetal monitoring is represented by a single paper here in the area of Doppler flow velocity studies.

Most exciting, in our opinion, are the papers in this issue reporting initial applications of **artificial intelligence** software to problem solving in obstetrics and gynecology, both from the perspective of

specific clinical problems and from the perspective of information retrieval. It is particularly in this area that further progress in clinical decision support and in bringing to bear accumulated knowledge in the care of Ob/Gyn patients may be expected over the next few years.

We hope that the reader will not be put off by the overall focus on computing in this issue of the Journal. We believe that the articles chosen for inclusion here are truly of interest and importance to the perinatal clinician and, scientist and that the Journal is to be congratulated for assuming a leadership role in making this information available to a broad constituency within Perinatology.

Review of the content of the papers in this issue of the Journal clearly indicates that we are much closer to a beginning than to an end. We anticipate much further progress. The next international meeting of the Society of Computer Applications in Obstetrics and Gynecology will be held in Kyoto, Japan, in October 1989. Thus, in about a year from the time of the general availability of this published information, a large number of new reports of further work are to be expected. If the papers published here catch your interest, perhaps we will have an opportunity of meeting with you in Kyoto.

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