MANY PHYSICIANS and patients do not believe that dermatology involves life-threatening situations. However, there are many emergencies that the dermatologist needs to address and many cutaneous diseases in the emergency room that require rapid dermatologic consultation. The dermatologist is frequently the first physician to examine such patients before a hospital admission and also the first to identify a critical situation, stabilize the patient, and choose urgent and appropriate intervention. The first chapters of this book are directed toward those dermatologists who care for hospitalized patients with severe and dangerous skin diseases. Later chapters are intended for all physicians, including dermatologists, who wish to hone their diagnostic skills, expand their knowledge and understanding of pathological events, and learn treatment options available for acute life-threatening skin diseases. This book brings together top dermatologists from around the world to address the complicated and multifaceted field of dermatologic emergencies for the practicing dermatologist and emergency physician.

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Preface

“Dermatology is the best specialty. The patient never dies – and never gets well.” (anonymous)

Many physicians and patients believe that dermatology does not involve life-threatening situations and that it is, like beauty, only skin deep (e.g., it is mainly an aesthetic specialty). Although the horrors of the syphilitics and the lepers of medieval times no longer exist, there are contemporary emergencies with which the dermatologist needs to contend, as well as cutaneous diseases that require rapid management.

Although the dermatologist is not likely to be the primary care physician responsible for the severely ill patients in the hospital setting, the skin disease specialist is still frequently the first clinician to examine these patients before hospital admission. The specialist may be responsible for making the initial diagnosis; for differentiating mundane skin ailments from more serious, life-threatening conditions; and also for being the first to identify a critical situation, to stabilize the patient, and to choose urgent and appropriate interventions.

Dermatologic emergencies and life-threatening skin diseases should be spared the “atrophy” that threatens knowledge that is not applied in everyday practice and fails to be refreshed from time to time. Dermatologists have no choice but to continue to be on the front line of diagnosing and treating all skin diseases, especially the more severe and acute ones.

This book brings together the top “players” in the lively, complicated, and multifaceted field of dermatologic emergencies and life-threatening skin diseases with the purpose of assisting the practicing physician in coping with dermatologic conditions that require urgent intervention. Although this book is intended primarily for dermatologists, it should also be of help to family practitioners, internists, and all those who practice in emergency rooms, intensive care units, and burn units in differentiating between skin diagnoses. Treating a severely ill dermatologic patient is always multidisciplinary teamwork. Although the trained eyes of the dermatologists and their extensive knowledge about diseases of the skin are indispensable for rapid and correct diagnosis and management of a dermatological emergency, fundamental knowledge of internal medicine, including cardiology, nephrology, and rheumatology, is also essential in this setting. This volume is intended to update and refresh what dermatologists and nondermatologists need to know for dealing with critically ill dermatologic patients. Emergency Dermatology should provide the link to the experience, expertise, and skills of various disciplines with the aim of guiding the medical caretakers of patients who are in true dermatological crises.

There are plenty of available dermatology textbooks. Some encompass widespread fields of dermatology (e.g., Fitzpatrick’s Dermatology in General Medicine) whereas others are devoted to special issues, such as dermatopathology, contact dermatitis, dermatologic surgery, photodermatology, and many others. There is currently no publication that covers all aspects of critically ill dermatologic patients. In Emergency Dermatology, we have attempted to retrieve and organize the relevant information and available knowledge on this specific niche of medicine and to fill the gap in available reference material to guide the medical caretakers of patients who are in true dermatological crises. Although we have strived for completeness, we recognize that certain entities have not been addressed as completely as some readers may wish; however, it is not our intention to provide an encyclopedic textbook, but rather a more usable volume.

We are indebted to all the distinguished international specialists who have consented to give of their valuable time and vast experience to cover this complex and vital
issue in a systematic and practical manner and who have produced such a comprehensive, state-of-the-art reference source of which we believe we can all be proud. If this book helps practicing physicians, both dermatologists and non-dermatologists alike, to cope with dermatologic emergencies by knowing what to do whenever they encounter severely ill patients with complicated skin diseases and reach the correct decisions in urgent and critical situations, it will all have been worth the effort.