This volume summarises the most recent advances in the optimal clinical management of preterm labour, using the best available evidence. Preterm labour remains a challenge today, even with the latest developments discussed here. The contributors (mostly practising clinicians) are all actively involved in research into the mechanisms, aetiology, treatment and associated outcomes of preterm labour. The chapters are based on common clinical scenarios and each provides a comprehensive literature review followed by evidence-based recommendations on appropriate management. A summary of the pathophysiology of parturition is provided, and the obstetric scenarios cover management of threatened preterm labour, management of preterm premature ruptured membranes and management of preterm labour with specific complications (such as intrauterine growth restriction). Other chapters include the epidemiology, prediction and prevention of preterm labour. Anaesthetic and paediatric issues are explored in depth, and there are chapters on the legal and organisational issues surrounding preterm labour.

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Preterm Labour
Managing Risk in Clinical Practice

Edited by

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Preface

J. E. Norman and I. A. Greer

Preterm labour and delivery remains the pre-eminent problem in modern obstetric practice. Around 6% of babies are delivered preterm in the UK and other developed countries. Prematurity has now overtaken congenital anomaly as the single biggest cause of perinatal mortality and morbidity. In view of the sequelae for the child and the mother and the high level of resource to manage this problem and its complications, preterm labour is a major healthcare problem in the developed world. Optimum management of the preterm parturient is informed by research into preterm labour, and significantly improves neonatal outcome. However, the rate of scientific advance in this area is enormous and it is difficult for the practising clinician to keep up to date, and translate this information into practice.

The purpose of this book is to provide an evidence-based approach for the prevention and treatment of preterm labour and its sequelae. We are fortunate to have been able to assemble a list of authors who are internationally acknowledged experts on the mechanisms, aetiology, treatment and associated outcomes of preterm labour. In additional, the majority are actively involved in the management of such problems in clinical practice, so bringing practical expertise to the underlying science. The authors have written an up-to-date clinically relevant text, based on evidence from both basic science and randomised clinical trials. It is not just the disease process and its management that is important. In modern practice the clinician is faced with the organisation of high-risk services, clinical risk management, and many legal and ethical issues surrounding preterm delivery and these issues are also addressed in this book providing a comprehensive text for contemporary practice.

This book is primarily aimed at practising obstetricians. The background science and detailed literature review make this book ideal for those with a special interest in the area. However, the structure of this book is such that information should be accessible to everyone involved in the case of the preterm-parturient from midwife to consultant.

We are indebted to the chapter authors who have each taken time to write a chapter that is both comprehensible and comprehensive, unstintingly sharing their knowledge and expertise. We are also grateful to Dr Alan Mathers for providing the ultrasound picture on the cover. We hope that those who buy this book will enjoy reading it and learning from it, as much as we have.