To many veterinarians, endocrinology is an enigmatic subject. The field seems filled with contradictions; recommendations for the best test or most appropriate therapy may vary with the source and often shift with time. Quite commonly, practitioners will call and ask our opinion about a new test or treatment they learned of while listening to a speaker at a local or national meeting. Often we sense frustration in these conversations in that there seem to be very few, if any, solid rules in approaching diagnosis or treatment of endocrine disease. Those of us close to this subject should understand the source of this bewilderment. A myriad of different testing protocols, recommendations for the “best” test(s), normal ranges, therapeutic options, etc. exist in the printed and spoken world of veterinary endocrinology. Exceptions and contradictions are the rule; for example, we focus considerable attention in interpreting lab test results on the possibility that the results were due to a false positive or negative.

There is another way to look at this quandary. At the root of the debate lies the fact that much remains to be learned. While we continually learn and advance by observing developments in humans and assessing their applicability to veterinary medicine, it is obvious that endocrine physiology and disease in companion animals is different in various aspects. In many ways, veterinary endocrinology is still in its infancy. As such, the field offers a rich potential for clinical investigation and laboratory research. There is great need for more comprehensive, multi-center case studies of spontaneous disease. Much more needs to be learned about the various strengths and weaknesses of testing methods in our patients, both those affected by the disease as well as those who are not affected but have suggestive clinical signs. In the basic science area, answers to questions such as why various species are prone to develop certain endocrine diseases could provide better understanding of the nature of such disorders in all animals. It is clear that new tests including species-specific hormone assays need to be developed (e.g., canine and feline growth hormone, “second generation” TSH assay). Despite these shortcomings, considerable progress has been made in veterinary endocrinology, and we hope that the field can attract inquisitive people who enjoy a challenge.

Our goal when assembling this issue was to provide a mix of information—new developments, prospects for the future as well as a review of practical and relevant material for the practitioner. We tried to select subjects of greatest
relevance to those working in companion animal medicine. Any success we had in accomplishing these goals is due to the efforts of our contributors. We wholeheartedly thank them for all their work and time. Special thanks also to John Vassallo of W.B. Saunders for his patience and advice over the course of this project. We would like to thank our colleagues and staff at the Auburn College of Veterinary Medicine for all their help, advice, and discussions. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the support and understanding provided by our families while we worked on this issue.

ELLEN N. BEHREND, VMD, MS, PhD
ROBERT J. KEMPPAINEN, DVM, PhD
Guest Editors

College of Veterinary Medicine
Auburn University
Auburn, AL 36849