EDITORIAL
In Search for a Better Marker of Acute Pancreatitis—Third Time Lucky? A. Viljoen and P.J. Twomey (see article on page 1506)

PERSPECTIVES
SPINK1: A New Therapeutic Target in Cancer? U.-H. Stenman

FGF23: Is It Ready for Prime Time? K. Wesseling-Perry

Q&A
Circulating Cancer Cells and Their Clinical Applications Moderator: E.P. Diamandis; Experts: K. Pantel, H.I. Scher, L. Terstappen, and E. Lianidou

CLINICAL CASE STUDY
Unexplained Hemolytic Anemia with Multiorgan Failure G. Raval, J.E. Straughen, G.A. McMillin, and J.A. Bornhorst

COMMENTS
M.E. Mullins

A. Dasgupta

MINI-REVIEW
Avoiding Pitfalls in Applying Prediction Models, As Illustrated by the Example of Prostate Cancer Diagnosis H. Cammann, K. Jung, H.-A. Meyer, and C. Stephan

REVIEW
Carbamylation-Derived Products: Bioactive Compounds and Potential Biomarkers in Chronic Renal Failure and Atherosclerosis S. Jaisson, C. Pietrement, and P. Gillery

ARTICLES
PROTEOMICS AND PROTEIN MARKERS

EVIDENCE-BASED MEDICINE AND TEST UTILIZATION

LIPIDS, LIPOPROTEINS, AND CARDIOVASCULAR RISK FACTORS
Purified Anthocyanin Supplementation Improves Endothelial Function via NO-cGMP Activation in Hypercholesterolemic Individuals Y. Zhu, M. Xia, Y. Yang, F. Liu, Z. Li, Y. Hao, M. Mi, T. Jin, and W. Ling

CANCER DIAGNOSTICS
Comparison of Serum Human Epididymis Protein 4 with Cancer Antigen 125 as a Tumor Marker in Patients with Malignant and Nonmalignant Diseases J.M. Escudero, J.M. Auge, X. Filella, A. Torne, J. Pahisa, and R. Molina

GENERAL CLINICAL CHEMISTRY

continued
ON THE COVER  Mary, Queen of Scots (also known as Mary Stuart, 1542–1587). By the time she became Queen at age 19, Mary Stuart’s body had already aged beyond its years. She had bouts of heartburn and vomiting. She developed gastric ulcers, arthritis, abdominal pain, lameness, eyesight problems, and emotional issues. Her reign lasted just 5 years. Had she lived 300 years later, Felix Hoppe-Seyler, an early pioneer in what we now call clinical chemistry, would have looked at her purple urine and identified the cause of her symptoms. We now know that Mary, Queen of Scots, suffered from acute intermittent porphyria, 1 of 10 porphyrias caused by gene abnormalities that are passed from parents to children. In fact, Mary passed the disease on to her son, James I, who passed the disease on to his son Henry. Because of the infrequent occurrence of porphyrias in the general population, diagnostic tests for porphyria are currently performed by specialized laboratories in many countries. However, data regarding the analytical and diagnostic performance of these laboratories are scarce. In this issue of Clinical Chemistry, Aarsand and colleagues describe the results of an external quality assessment program for porphyrin testing. Their results reinforce the importance of external quality assessment schemes as a tool to improve patient care. (See page 1514.)

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