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Introduction

Chagas' Heart Disease is a prominent public health problem in several countries, and one of the most important causes of morbidity and mortality in South America. The disease was discovered in 1909 by Carlos Chagas in Brazil. It is endemic in South America, with an estimate of about 16 million people infected, and nine million people running significant risk for infection, with high social costs.

Such a heavy social burden has implications for public health policies in regard to aspects such as blood transfusion and organ transplantation.

Contemporary extensive population migration, from rural to urban areas, and from one country to another, led to epidemiologic modifications and detection of Chagas' disease even in countries where it had not existed before (e.g. United States).

In addition, the parasite of Chagas' disease, *Trypanosoma cruzi*, develops a peculiar relationship with the human host, leading to very peculiar pathophysiological and clinical derangements.

As a public health problem, most medical facilities in our country are committed to the study of Chagas'

disease and to the of patients. Thus, clinical expertise and observation developed in different institutions, university-affiliated or not, all over the country.

Currently clinical experience grows faster, and is accompanied by significant achievements in the understanding of pathophysiology, as a direct consequence of research in the field. However, the bulk of scientific contributions in the area is published in Portuguese, rendering its access more difficult to non-Portuguese speaking readers.

This issue of the "Paulista" section (The São Paulo State Society of Cardiology) of the Brazilian Society of Cardiology, and the Cardiology branch of the "Paulista" (i.e. from São Paulo State) section of the Brazilian Medical Association contains some recent data on Chagas' disease, from São Paulo State Institutions. It includes contributions on epidemiology, pathogenesis, pathologic anatomy, diagnosis, pathophysiology, clinical aspects, and treatment.

We hope that the subjects reviewed in this issue may be of interest to different researchers working in the wide variety of problems involved with Chagas' heart disease.