

INTRODUCTION

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Paediatric endocrinology is a recent field of research of which fetal endocrinology is growing faster.

It has been known that the peak velocity of intrauterine growth in length is reached in the mid-trimester and growth in weight catch up at about 34 weeks. Brain growth seems to have a pattern of its own and has a peak of neuronal growth at about 26 weeks and of glial tissue growth at term.

The metabolic effects of growth hormone were found to be mediated by another substance, called sulphation factor by Salmon and Daughaday (1957). What was thought originally to be a single factor, now turns out to be a complicated series of substances called somatomedins.

Fetal growth hormone itself seems not to be essential, anencephalic infants with absent pituitaries are reputed to be normal in length at birth. Prolactin seems an unlikely candidate for fetal growth promotion for the same reason.

What all these hormones may in fact be doing, is to stimulate the somatomedins and other growth factors which are just beginning to be recognised in older children (Brook 1978)