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

The BONE MARROW is the most labile tissue in the body, except the blood itself. Although widely dispersed, the bone marrow must be regarded as a single organ, the largest in the body. Its volume has been estimated as ranging from 60 to 90 ml in the newborn, and from 1600 to 4500 ml in adults (Nathan & Oski, 1981).

In fact, it is more than twice the size of the liver. All the blood corpuscles, except lymphocytes, are formed in the marrow, while some monocytes arise elsewhere. Other functions, notably erythrocyte destruction and fat storage, are of importance, but are shared with other organs and tissues. Certain elements in the bone marrow engage in the bone formation and remodelling (Wintrobe, 1981).

Bone marrow biopsies are now widely used in the investigation and follow-up of many diseases. These are essential for the differential diagnosis of most cytopenias and for early recognition of fibrosis, which most frequently occurs as a consequence of megakaryocytic proliferation in the myeloproliferative disorders "MPD" (Burkhardt et al., 1982).

In the last few years, bone marrow transplantation has achieved remarkable progress. This can be appreciated from the number of transplantations now undertaken as a routine. In North America, 12 - 15 patients have a bone marrow transplantation each week. In Europe, the rate is similar, including about three per week in Britain (Haws et al., 1981).