

## 376 Approach to the Patient with Endocrine Disorders

J. Larry Jameson

The management of endocrine disorders requires a broad understanding of intermediary metabolism, reproductive physiology, bone metabolism, and growth. Accordingly, the practice of endocrinology is intimately linked to a conceptual framework for understanding hormone secretion, hormone action, and principles of feedback control ([Chap. 377](#)). The endocrine system is evaluated primarily by measuring hormone concentrations, arming the clinician with valuable diagnostic information. Most disorders of the endocrine system are amenable to effective treatment once the correct diagnosis is established. Endocrine deficiency disorders are treated with physiologic hormone replacement; hormone excess conditions, which usually are caused by benign glandular adenomas, are managed by removing tumors surgically or reducing hormone levels medically.

### SCOPE OF ENDOCRINOLOGY

Classically, the specialty of endocrinology encompasses the study of glands and the hormones they produce. Over time, the field has expanded because of the discovery of hormones and growth factors produced by the brain, gastrointestinal (GI) tract, musculoskeletal system, and other nonglandular organs. The term *endocrine* was coined by Starling to contrast the actions of hormones secreted internally (*endocrine*) with those secreted externally (*exocrine*) or into a lumen, such as the GI tract. The term *hormone*, derived from a Greek phrase meaning “to set in motion,” aptly describes the dynamic actions of hormones as they elicit cellular responses and regulate physiologic processes through feedback mechanisms.

Unlike many other specialties in medicine, it is not possible to define endocrinology strictly along anatomic lines. The classic