Concluding Remarks

Dr. Battaglia: From my point of view, this conference has been very successful. It was timely to bring people together from basic research and clinical research. We covered a variety of new areas in methodology, ranging from molecular biology to clinically applicable techniques, that can be applied to learn much more about placental function and fetal nutrition. We have touched on how are we beginning to tackle the difficult problem of heterogeneity in growth retardation, and we have started to subdivide cases into more clinically homogeneous groups. That encourages me to think that we will be able to begin directing more specific therapy at subgroups, because it is really necessary first to have a homogeneous subgroup before you attempt therapy. If you try to improve fetal growth when retardation stems from 15 different causes, you can almost tell in advance that it will be unsuccessful, even though you have a few outliers who will be helped. So I think we are getting closer to this.

The discussions that followed each presentation were really excellent; that has been a major contribution to the meeting. Perhaps 5 or 6 years ago we wouldn’t have been so careful in how we phrased the questions. Language is terribly important in science, and it is clear we have made progress. Only a few years ago, people were very sloppy in talking about placentation and its development, and in defining what they meant by intrauterine growth retardation. We have clearly gone a long way now in making our language more precise, so we are all talking about the same kinds of patients and the same kinds of problems. For me, this conference has been a real help in that regard. I think we were good in saying where our knowledge ends and where we begin to speculate—where we have hypotheses we would like to test, and that is also useful.

I would like to thank everyone involved. I would like to thank Nestlé for putting on this conference. I think I wrote to them about 7 years ago proposing the topic and I thought they had forgotten about it, but they are a very careful company and wrote me about 2 years ago to say that now is time to do this! It so happens the timing is very good. Young people who have come to this conference are, I hope, leaving recognizing that the tools are in place in the field of obstetrics to answer so many questions that we have posed for many years but now can go out and find definitive answers. One of my mentors used to remind me that it wasn’t important to have the first word in the field, it was important to have the last word in the field—that your work should be definitive. I think we are getting to the point where we’ll see a lot more definitive work around these obstetric problems, and it is very exciting. So I thank you all for participating, both speakers and observers.