widely known as whiplash, cervical acceleration/deceleration trauma typically occurs as a result of a rear end automobile collision. This might cause damage to vertebrae and cervical tissue in the neck, with no visible and easily attestable signs of injury. In recent years, whiplash has become a nightmare for doctors, lawyers, rehabilitation specialists, bioengineers and insurers, not only in Switzerland, but across the whole of western Europe, North America and Australia.

What is essentially at dispute is cause and effect. The impact of a collision may produce a relatively small change in the speed of the vehicle that is struck: Are the injuries to passengers, and resulting symptoms that may arise, to be attributed to this impact, or rather to other important factors unconnected with the accident? Or is it somehow possible that both apply? And how can we assess the contribution of rehabilitation treatment, which may be misdirected, or be applied too late or not at all? Can this type of accident also lead to brain injury (ie, mild traumatic brain injury)?

Much depends on the answers to these questions: diagnosis, choice of medical treatment and rehabilitation measures and not least of all the legal attribution of costs. A great deal of money is at stake, which is one of the main reasons why there have been such frequent and bitter disputes over whiplash claims.

The International Congress which was held in Bern in Switzerland from 8th-10th March 2001 brought together leading specialists from home and abroad to try to sum up the medical, biomechanical and legal research in this field. The conference also addressed new approaches to the reintegration of those with injuries back into the workforce. The present volume now makes available to the public almost all of the principal contributions to the congress, that is the key lectures and rewarded free communications.

We would like to thank all those who through their words, deeds or financial assistance helped to make it possible to organize this congress and to publish its most important findings in book form. Special mention here must be made of the Swiss accident insurance institution (SUVA) and the Swiss Insurers Association (SVV). Our thanks go also to Daniel P Wyss, Assistant to the Chair of Labor and Social Insurance Law at the University of Fribourg, who coordinated the publication.

It is our hope that the congress and the papers published here can contribute to solving many of the problems associated with cervical acceleration/deceleration trauma.

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