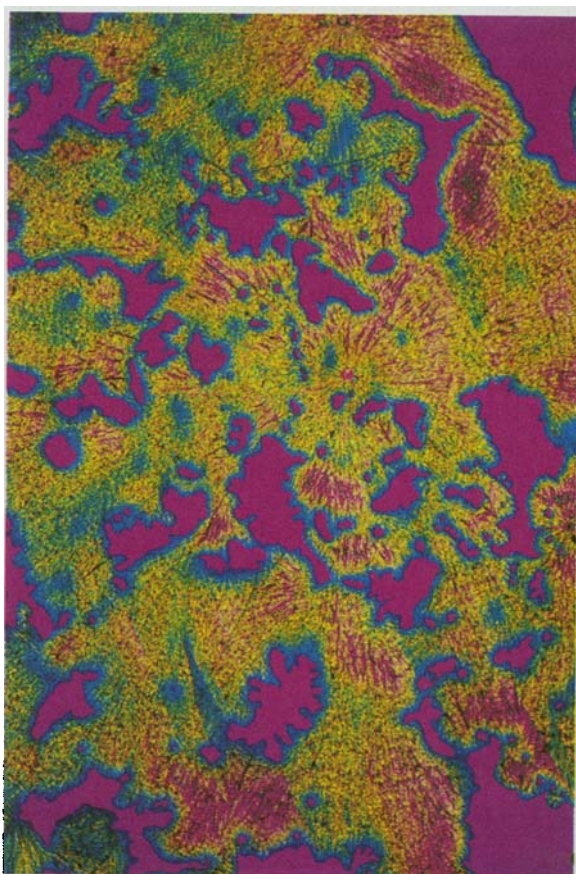


Progesterone

*Electromicrograph by
Michael W. Davidson,
Florida State University,
Tallahassee*

The placenta produces enormous quantities of estrogens and progesterone during pregnancy; the resulting high levels of steroids in the maternal circulation rise steadily as pregnancy progresses. Since the placenta does not possess the enzyme systems to accomplish this alone, precursors for progesterone must be supplied from the ma-

*From the Division of Drugs and Toxicology. Drug Evaluations
Subscription. Chicago, Ill: American Medical Association;
1990;III:6:2.*

ternal circulation and precursors for estrogen from the fetal adrenal cortex (the fetoplacental unit for steroid production). The functions of the high levels of estrogen and progesterone during pregnancy are not completely understood, but some are probable: Progesterone may maintain myometrial quiescence and lack of irritability, and it may serve as a precursor for fetal adrenal corticosteroids. Estrogen stimulates uterine growth and uteroplacental blood flow.