

Editorial

A question which frequently exercises the minds of those dealing with leprosy is the value of reactions, occurring either spontaneously or as the result of treatment. The loose use of the word "reaction" is largely responsible for the confusion which exists. By this term is meant the swelling up and congestion of lesions accompanied to a greater or lesser degree by febrile and other general disturbances. These signs may occur with great suddenness, last for a variable period, and almost as suddenly subside, leaving the skin as it was before. Such reactions may recur at regular or irregular intervals, when severe ulceration, especially of nodules, may occur. Bacteriological examination does not show an increase of acid-fast bacilli in the lesions as the cause of focal reactions, so that they are probably of a toxic or allergic nature. Reactions of this nature occur as a rule in patients who are in a weak state of general health, and they tend to weaken still further the condition of the patient. They are often followed by disastrous results, especially when the delicate structures of the eye are affected, or when sudden swelling of the ulnar or peroneal nerve results in trophic and other changes in the extremities. Such reactions are difficult to control, and their treatment often requires great skill and patience.

In carrying out the treatment of leprosy with hydno-carpus and other preparations, great care should be exercised to avoid reactions of this nature. Excessive injections or the administration of iodides in debilitated patients not infrequently set up reactions which are difficult to stop and cause the patient great harm.

On the other hand there seems reason to believe that in patients with sound physique, firm muscles and sound general health, the induction of slight, well controlled reactions of short duration, may be of benefit in causing destruction of bacilli and promoting recovery. The all-essential fact is that they should not cause deterioration in the general condition of the patient. The erythrocyte sedimentation test, when carried out regularly once a week is invaluable in regulating treatment along these lines, for it is easy to perform and

gives a delicate indication of the slightest deterioration in the condition of the patient.

The intradermal method of giving hydnocarpus injections has the great advantage that strictly localised reaction is brought about in a limited area, leading to local destruction of infection and producing at the same time a slight generalised reaction which is beneficial in dealing with infection in other parts of the body.

The *sine qua non* in leprosy treatment is a certain level of general health. Above this level the reaction to special treatment promotes improvement; below this level it only causes deterioration.

Conflicting reports reach us from different leprosy treatment centres. In some the patients have to be begged and bribed and run after. In others the doctors are embarrassed by patients clamouring for treatment and willing to walk any distance, wait any length of time and endure any pain they may be subjected to. What makes the difference? The most important thing is the way you set about it at the beginning. Whatever you do, never run after patients. Once you begin you have to keep running after them all the time. Make the patient feel that he is being favoured—not favouring the doctor. Once this, the right attitude has been established, skill, sympathy and common sense will do the rest. Compulsion should never be used. Once the right *rappport* has been established between physician and patient, the temporary withholding of treatment is all the punishment necessary to maintain discipline.

If the wrong relationship has, through a primary mistake been established, the only way is to start all over again. Stop treatment and begin again with one or two who are keen, if they can be found. Better results will be obtained by restricting oneself to a few such than by subjecting a hundred to compulsory injections. After all, the main part of the treatment is dependent on the good will and keen co-operation of the patient. No leper will ever be benefitted to any great extent under compulsion.