

FAMILIAL LEPROSY

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In 1936, Brakon, a male Land Dayak from Kg. Sudoh, Upper Sarawak, Bau, aged 36 years, was admitted to this Settlement complaining of "numbness in the shoulders and back"; after a year's treatment he was sent back to his home. During the Japanese occupation of Sarawak he noticed nodules on his left upper arm, this was about 1943, and these gradually extended until he was sent to the Settlement in 1950, where he has remained ever since.

Remarks recorded on his admission show "nodules all over his body, right hand deformed, some anaesthesia, smear positive." According to staff and patients he was "one of the worst in the settlement" and was quite obviously a grossly lepromatous case. Since then the other hand has become involved with some absorption of the fingers. His smears remained positive until 1954, when they became negative and have remained so to date. He has attended treatment very faithfully and there are now no signs of active disease, although the stigmata remain. He has stated that he cannot recall any other person suffering from leprosy in his immediate vicinity but adds that it is very difficult to recall this with any certainty after these years.

On the 5th November, 1956, a member of our staff met a young boy wandering along the road which leads to the Settlement. Noting that he appeared to be lost he stopped and spoke to him, observed the crippling of the hands, and found from the boy that he was looking for his father—Brakon. He then brought the lad to the Settlement where his spot diagnosis was only too easily confirmed, the boy was admitted and he and his father re-united. The boy stated that he had been living with his grandfather on his farm but wanted to see his father, so left to find him—it is more than likely that the grandfather became anxious about the crippling, etc., and sent him here, knowing that his father was already a patient under treatment. (See appendix for details.)

Knowing that there was a large family left at home we asked the Divisional Medical Officer to arrange for an examination and this was done. The Hospital Assistant, Bau, collected the family and sent them to the General Hospital, Kuching, where five of the remaining eight members of the family were found to be suffering from leprosy. Thus, out of a family of ten, seven are suffering from the disease.

Of the six members of the family admitted in November, 1956, only one is smear positive. It would appear that the other five are of the Indeterminate type and it may be that the other has evolved through Indeterminate to Lepromatous. Whatever his condition in 1936/7 the father was, in 1950, a grossly lepromatous case and, it would seem, has infected most of his family. The remaining three members of the family have returned to their home and farm and will be kept under regular observation.

The kampong from which this family comes has not been living together in the usual way but split up some years ago—each family living on its own farm. Brakon himself states that he and his family lived on their own farm for many years before he came here in 1950.

This family is a proof, if it were required, of the value of the checking of the contacts of known cases—a policy which we have recently stressed and which is being put into effect not only as each new case is admitted but also throughout the various divisions.

Appended herewith please find details of each member of the family concerned.

Examination of patients admitted November, 1956, being members of family of Brakon

- No. 1. Son, aged 18 years; admitted 5th November, 1956. Smears negative; extensive hypopigmented skin lesions with slightly active edges on shoulders, back and chest; hypopigmented flat lesion on face; glove anaesthesia both hands; main-en-griffe both hands; trophic ulcer on each foot. First observed lesions about four years ago.
- No. 2. Wife of Brakon, aged 45 years; admitted 19th November, 1956. Smears negative; small hypopigmented skin lesion on right elbow; glove anaesthesia right hand; crippling with absorption of fingers of right hand. First observed lesion about two years ago.
- No. 3. Daughter, aged 20 years; admitted 19th November, 1956. Smears negative; lesions on face active in appearance; extensive hypopigmented flat skin lesions on back, shoulders, chest, abdomen and right thigh; glove anaesthesia both hands; slight crippling in fingers of both hands. First observed lesions on back about three years ago.
- No. 4. Daughter, aged 14 years; admitted 19th November, 1956. Smears negative; lesions on forearms and legs with active appearance; no anaesthesia or crippling. First observed during the past few months.
- No. 5. Son, aged 13; admitted 19th November, 1956. Smears positive; faintly diffused lesions throughout chest, arms, back and legs; lesions on face with active appearance, and ears slightly nodular and swollen; no anaesthesia or crippling. First observed lesion on right cheek about two years ago.
- No. 6. Son, aged 11; admitted 19th November, 1956. Smears negative; lesions on face with active appearance; on back faintly diffused; on legs extensive flat and hypopigmented; trophic changes in legs; anaesthesia very slight; signs of slight absorption of toes on right foot. First observed lesions about one year ago.