

Letters to the Editor

28th December, 1965

Dear Sir,

A recent paper by Tran-Van-Bang and Nguyen-Huan-Truong from the Institut Pasteur de Viet-Nam entitled 'Le Lepreuc Est Un Malade Mental' published in the Bulletin De La Societe De Pathologie Exotique, Volume 57 (Nov. – Dec.) 1964, page 1200 states that in their experience 'mental depression is frequent and can lead to suicide.' The article gives no figures but hints that suicide is not infrequent.

As this statement is not in tune with our recent experience we have studied the number of suicides occurring in the Sungei Buloh Leprosarium over the past 23 years and have found that although 17 people committed suicide during that time nobody has done so since 1954. It seems to me that this finding is not without interest and does perhaps reflect the generally higher optimism that has prevailed about the treatment of patients with leprosy. I wonder whether a similar change for the better has been noted in other leprosarria.

J. H. S. Pettit, M.D., M.R.C.P.

January 11th, 1966

To the Editor:

My respected friend and mentor, Dr Robert Cochrane, in a highly respectable effort to prevent the unwary clinician from taking a positive nasal mucosal smear for acid fast bacilli too seriously, has accomplished just the opposite by saying (LR 36:196) 'taking a nasal smear does not *necessarily* establish a diagnosis of leprosy.' The italics are mine. The inference could well be that it only establishes a diagnosis of leprosy if it is positive! The fact is that it *never* establishes a diagnosis of leprosy – and, further, that a nasal smear should never even be taken

with this purpose in mind, since it cannot ever confirm or exclude the diagnosis. It is dangerous to so use it even in the most expert hands; it is inexcusable for the inexpert to use it. I know Dr Cochrane believes this. It's only that he didn't say it!

Harry L. Arnold, Jr., M.D.

15th January, 1966

Dear Dr Ross Innes,

In *Leprosy Review* No. 4, 1965, you published a letter from Dr F. Contreras, in which he discusses the advisability and the legitimacy of experiments on healthy persons by attempting to infect them with leprosy. The writer, subscribing to the opinion which I put forward in *Leprosy Review* No. 1, 1964, categorically rejects the idea of such experiments. He thinks, however, that I misunderstood the substance of the article by him and Gay Prieto in Mem. Congreso Int. Leprol. (Madrid, 1953), inaccurately translating the text.

In this connection, I quote an extract from the editorial 'Twenty Years of Medical Activity in the Fight Against Leprosy (1948–1959)', published in the '*WHO Chronicle*', vol. 14, no. 1, 1960, p. 8 and written, as may be seen from the footnote, with the assistance and concurrence of Dr Gay Prieto (the first author of the article which provoked the discussion): '... It is illustrated by the exceptional clinical observations made by Gay Prieto and Contreras on a young man of 26 years, who for 14 months was inoculated with the blood of patients with strong lepra reactions, with the mucus from lepromatous patients laden with bacilli, and with biopsy fragments. After 8 years of observation he had not developed the slightest suspicion of leprosy.'

V. Loginov