

News Items

LEPRA GOES INTERNATIONAL

The British Leprosy Relief Association, known since 1964 as LEPRA, has now become an international association. At an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Association held on 24 September, 1970, and presided over by Sir George Seel, K.C.M.G., Chairman of the Executive Committee, a resolution was unanimously passed that would have the effect of abolishing the clauses in LEPRA's Memorandum of Association restricting its activities to the countries of the British Commonwealth.

BELRA, the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association, was founded in 1924 by Sir Frank Carter, Sir Leonard Rogers, and the Rev. Frank Oldrieve, who became its first General Secretary. The word "Empire" was dropped from the title in 1957.

In establishing and sponsoring *Leprosy Review*, LEPRA has never subscribed to any artificial limitation of one of its principal duties, which is "to spread the knowledge that modern science could treat and finally prevent the spread of leprosy". Henceforth, however, LEPRA will be able to allocate funds to approved leprosy projects in all countries without distinction.

OPENING OF THE "COCHRANE ANNEXE" AT OXFORD

On 11 August, the veteran leprologist, Dr. Robert G. Cochrane, C.M.G., formally opened an Annexe—to be called after him—at the Slade Hospital, Oxford. For several years the need has been felt for a small unit where patients suffering from leprosy might be investigated and treated in close proximity to distinguished



Dr. and Mrs. Cochrane at the opening ceremony. (Reproduced by kind permission of *The Oxford Mail*)

medical specialists and research facilities. The inspiration for the creation of such a unit came from Dr. Cochrane himself (at the time Consultant Adviser in Leprosy to the Ministry of Health) with the wholehearted support of Dr. Renwick Vickers, dermatologist and Member of the Panel of Leprosy Opinion. Thanks to a generous grant from the Nuffield Foundation, which augmented the allocation from official sources, the Cochrane Annexe was erected.

The modest but adequate building comprises 6 single-bedded rooms for patients, a laboratory, a library, and offices, together with a larger room for group discussions, clinical meetings and scientific exhibitions. Selected patients will spend short periods in the wards for initial investigations, stabilization of treatment, research into nerve and orthopaedic complications, etc. Although the Annexe is primarily intended for patients suffering from leprosy, it will be no surprise to those acquainted with the eclectic dermatological interests of Dr. Vickers and his colleagues to learn that investigations in depth into various dermatoses are contemplated. The considerable clinical and pathological expertise of the Oxford School of Medicine will be at the call of the workers in the Cochrane Annexe.

As Dr. Vickers suggested in his opening speech at the well-attended ceremony, leprosy may not constitute in England a problem of vast dimensions or imposing threat, but—echoing the words of the Minister of Health at the Ninth International Leprosy Congress, London, 1968—he emphasized that British workers were under an obligation to utilize their considerable investigative resources in solving some of the outstanding problems posed by the disease.

INTERNATIONAL LEPROSY COLLOQUIUM, BORSTEL (GERMANY), 26-27 AUGUST, 1970

Under the joint auspices of the Borstel Forschungsinstitut, the Skin Department of the University Clinic of Hamburg and the German Leprosy Relief Association (Deutsches Aussätzigenhilfswerk of Würzburg), a highly successful Colloquium on leprosy was held on

26 and 27 August, 1970, at the Borstel Institute, 25 miles north of Hamburg. There were 105 registered and invited participants from 23 countries, not counting several score visitors who helped to fill the auditorium, where 73 papers were presented in English, French and German (with simultaneous translation provided).

Such meetings of workers and research scientists interested in leprosy, held between the quinquennial Congresses of the International Leprosy Association, bring together in fruitful contact not only well-known figures seen from time to time in both hemispheres, but also isolated leprologists and microbiologists who rarely have the opportunity of discussing their problems with others working in related fields. For this reason, this Colloquium is to be welcomed. Although many of the papers provided nothing new, and presented merely a rehash of published work on hackneyed themes, other contributors gave up-to-the-minute results of original work.

Problems of cultivation of the fastidious *Mycobacterium leprae* were discussed with new insights and with the aid of simple laboratory apparatus. The mouse footpad inoculation technique is being routinely utilized for screening selected groups of anti-mycobacterial drugs. More work is being done on the globulin fractions of the serum in lepromatous leprosy. The sophisticated techniques of electron microscopy, immunofluorescence and experimental microbiology are being pressed into the service of leprosy investigation.

The application of recent advances in knowledge to the field control of leprosy regrettably lags far behind. Few of the participants in the Colloquium were concerned with the frustrating and disappointing organization of practical leprosy control projects. The epidemiologists elaborated their theories, and the reconstructive surgeons reported the results of their operative procedures. Shoemakers brought us down to earth with a pedestrian account of the problems of the ulcerated and anaesthetic extremities of millions of our fellowmen.

Seventy-three papers in 2 full days represented a great deal of reading and listening, and perhaps too little time for thinking and appraising and discussing. However, the closing session came alive as some of the participants took the opportunity for getting to grips with the practical problems confronting the specialist workers.

The excellent arrangements made by the Borstel Institute, and particularly the genial supervision of Dr. E. Freerksen and Dr. J. Kimmig, merit nothing but praise. Hotel reservations, transport, culinary arrangements (including a superb banquet at Trembüttel) were very much appreciated.

The papers presented at the Colloquium will be published in a special number of the *International Journal of Leprosy*.

C.I.O.M.S.

These initial letters stand for the Council of International Organizations of Medical Sciences. The Council unites specialist bodies—such as the International Leprosy Association—in a non-governmental and representative agency that can concern itself with broader matters of medical policy and direction, research and training, ethics and responsibility. Loosely-knit but strong, informal yet influential, working in close association with the World Health Organization and UNESCO yet remaining vigorously independent of these bodies, the Council provides a forum for serious discussion and debate. It encourages the holding of international meetings where these may serve some useful medical purpose. It addresses itself from time to time to the larger areas where medicine and ethics meet, and has organized useful Round Table discussions on such themes as “Biomedical science and the dilemma of human experimentation”, “Heart transplantation”, “Evaluation of drugs—whose responsibility?”, which have resulted in publications that should be taken seriously by governments and medical research councils.

The International Leprosy Association is a member of the Council of International Or-

ganizations of Medical Sciences, and has profited practically from its adherence, having received a grant from that body towards expenses of translation and publication incurred at the London (1968) Congress.

The Council is at present conducting a comprehensive study on the nomenclature of diseases: it is to be hoped that the classification of leprosy and the meanings to be attached to the terms used in this specialty will be clarified and delimited—to the benefit of those who read (in English, French, Russian or Spanish) as well as those who write.

Another matter of common concern to both the C.I.O.M.S. and leprosy is the rapid and accurate dissemination of advances in the biomedical sciences. It is not enough to discover and to record: despite the enormous and inescapable difficulties consequent on the accumulation of knowledge and the fragmentation of science, the really important advances must be made available, in understandable language, to wider audiences. The C.I.O.M.S. encourages member organizations to forge links with similar bodies and stimulates the developing awareness of mutual dependence and collective concern. In the whole matter of medical education (of auxiliaries as well as doctors), now as never before subject to change and flux and experimentation, the C.I.O.M.S. could undertake an invaluable role in correlating and co-ordinating the various national and international groups currently studying some aspects of this important topic.

FONTILLES (SPAIN)—PLANS FOR EXPANSION

The dynamic Medical Director of the Fontilles Leprosy Sanatorium, Alicante, Spain, Dr. Terencio de las Aguas, has prepared plans to augment the facilities already available at the Sanatorium and to increase both the teaching and research aspects of the programme.

At present, about 300 leprosy patients are under treatment at Fontilles as in-patients, and there are beds for another 200. A total of 3000 patients have been treated since the institution began admitting patients. The

medical team comprises (in addition to the Medical Director), 3 resident doctors, 5 qualified (male) nurses, as well as 24 nursing sisters of the Order of the "Terciarias de la Inmaculada", and 25 volunteer helpers of both sexes. Visiting specialists in the main branches of medicine make their services available to the patients.

The well-known journal *Fontilles* publishes original scientific articles on leprosy—some 281 so far—as well as news and abstracts of interest to Spanish medical readers.

The teaching activities of the staff have had a wide influence on the standards of leprosy care beyond Spain itself. Nineteen courses of instruction have been given, 10 of them for qualified doctors and the rest for paramedical staff, and altogether about 500 students have profited from these courses. The Order of Malta has generously borne the main financial burden.

The plans for the future are largely based on the stimulation and encouragement afforded by ELEP (the Co-ordinating Committee of the European Leprosy Organizations) and include 2 courses annually for doctors with a maximum of 25 doctors for each course. It is intended that the courses should last for 15 to 20 days. The media of instruction would be English, French, German and Spanish. The lecturers would be drawn not only from the staff of Fontilles, but also from Spanish Medical Colleges and abroad. It may be possible later to inaugurate bursaries for students wishing to devote longer periods of, say, 3 to 6 months, to leprosy studies.

The clinical and laboratory facilities at present available would, in the opinion of Dr. Terencio, make Fontilles an ideal European Research Centre for leprosy. If this suggestion meets with acceptance, some new buildings will be required and additions will have to be made to the medical and technical staff.

BRITISH COUNCIL FOR REHABILITATION OF THE DISABLED, FOURTH INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR, EDINBURGH, 27 JUNE TO 3 JULY, 1971

The British Council for Rehabilitation of the Disabled is organizing its Fourth International

Seminar and Exhibition in Edinburgh, Scotland, from 27 June to 3 July, 1971, on the theme "Rehabilitation—a Unified Concept" (international, governmental, and local government hospital services). Official participants will include: Her Majesty's Government, the United Nations Organization, the International Labour Office, and the World Health Organization.

While no papers on leprosy are to be invited, it is not unlikely that reference will be made to leprosy in the reports of the official participants at the plenary sessions. A most fruitful session on leprosy, including papers and discussion, was included in the programme of the Eleventh World Congress of the International Society for Rehabilitation of the Disabled (I.S.R.D.), which was held in Dublin from 14 to 19 September, 1969 (see *Leprosy Review*, 1970 **41**, 5 and 57).

Enquiries are invited from the Secretary General of the British Council for Rehabilitation of the Disabled (Commander Ian R. Henderson), Tavistock House (South), Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9LB.

AMERICAN CONGRESS OF REHABILITATION MEDICINE

The 49th Annual Meeting of the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine will take place in San Juan, Puerto Rico, from 7 to 12 November, 1971. Preceding the meeting, there will be a Prosthetics Course arranged by the San Juan Veterans Administration Hospital from 1 to 5 November, the subject being "Recent advances of prosthetics and orthotics". After the meeting, members will be free to take a post-Congress tour to Caracas, Venezuela (13 to 16 November), to join the Second Caribbean Congress on Rehabilitation Medicine.

Those interested are invited to get in touch with Mr. Creston C. Herold, Executive Director, American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine, 30 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60602, or Dr. Herman J. Flax, President, American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine, 310 De Diego Street, Suite 301, Santurce, P.R., U.S.A. 00909.

ELEP MEDICAL COMMISSION

Under the Chairmanship of Dr. L. P. Aujoulat, the Medical Commission of ELEP (the European Federation of Anti-leprosy Associations) met in Paris on 23 and 24 October, 1970, to examine numerous projects for financial assistance submitted to member-organizations and to advise on matters of policy.

Voluntary agencies are no longer concerned only with fund-raising and propaganda, but are becoming more and more involved—in co-operation with each other and with Governments—in the larger matters of epidemiology and research. The advice of the Medical Commission was sought on new proposals for co-operative projects, on desirable new emphases in national leprosy campaigns, and on new teaching facilities available. Since the bodies represented in ELEP are raising annually considerable funds for leprosy work all over the world, it is more than ever necessary that they should seek and heed expert advice on the spending of these funds.

IN VITRO CULTIVATION OF *MYCOBACTERIUM LEPRAE*

At the International Leprosy Colloquium held at the Forschungsinstitut, Borstel (Hamburg, Germany) on 26 and 27 August, 1970, Dr. R. Bönicke presented a paper that may in future

years be seen to be of fundamental importance in the history of the continuing attempts to induce *Myc. leprae* to remain viable and to multiply in artificial culture media.

Dr. Bönicke uses specially made U-shaped tubes, separated in the middle of the U by a sintered glass filter plate (Schott G 5). Liquid culture medium is delivered to each limb of the tube. Into one limb the inoculum containing living *Myc. leprae* is introduced; the other limb is utilized for periodical replacement of the medium. The rationale of the procedure is that an organism with a long generation time would be subject to the accumulated toxic effects of products of metabolism and inherent biochemical degradation; if these could be removed, as formed, before they reached toxic concentrations, the organisms would perhaps continue to multiply.

Dr. Bönicke has demonstrated such multiplication over a period of 9 to 12 months, giving a generation time of between 20.8 and 41.3 days, with an average of 28 days.

The happy choice of some such simple physical principle has long been awaited by microbiologists, and it is possible that other workers will now employ the same or similar methods for cultivating an organism that has so far resisted the acumen and resource of generations of bacteriologists.