

News and Notes

IN VITRO CULTIVATION OF LEPROSY BACILLI, A NEW CLAIM

The much heralded claim by Professor Skinsnes and his colleagues for the *in vitro* cultivation of leprosy bacilli which was announced in the world press in late 1975, is now published in the *International Journal of Leprosy* (1975, 43, 193) under the heading "*In vitro* cultivation of leprosy bacilli on hyaluronic acid based medium. 1. Preliminary report". In this publication the authors state—"The purpose of this presentation is to describe prolific growth of *M. leprae* (and also *M. lepraemurium*) in this medium and to demonstrate the reasonable probability that the claimed *M. leprae* culture is indeed this organism". The essential growth factor is hyaluronic acid incorporated as the sodium salt at a concentration of 0.1% in an otherwise simple medium prepared as a liquid or a solid, by the incorporation of 2% agar. The rationale for incorporating hyaluronic acid into the medium for attempting to cultivate *M. leprae* was based on the earlier observations of Skinsnes and his colleagues that *M. leprae* was particularly concentrated in tissue sites associated with the presence of acid mucopolysaccharides from the host. They were further encouraged to try hyaluronic acid for *in vitro* cultivation from their findings that *M. leprae* multiplied more extensively in mice when bacillary inocula included hyaluronic acid and were followed by repeated injections with hyaluronic acid. Their claim to have cultured *M. leprae in vitro* is based on organisms recovered from these mice and also strains of *M. leprae* obtained directly from patients.

Although it is universally agreed every aspect of our understanding of leprosy would be enhanced by the successful *in vitro* cultivation of the causative organism, no new claim is currently justified until it has been rigorously checked and independently confirmed. Skinsnes and his colleagues have chosen to publish before having their claim checked at other centres. Moreover, the American Leprosy Mission have prematurely launched a major appeal for funds based on Skinsnes' claim.

Final confirmation of Skinsnes' claim is now awaited from those centres to whom he has recently sent his cultures of *M. leprae*.

LEPRA JOINS ILEP

At the 11th General Assembly of ILEP (the International Federation of Leprosy Associations) held in Paris on 27-28 March, 1976, The British Leprosy Relief Association (LEPRA) was welcomed as a new member. Fame Pereo (of Canada) was also admitted. The total membership now stands at 19.

The Annual Report of the Secretary-General, presented to the Assembly, recorded that the Member-Organizations of ILEP raised in the year 1974, the sum of 13.6 million US \$, of which about 12 million US \$ went to the support of 531 centres or projects, and 0.8 million to research. The number of leprosy patients

under treatment from these centres in 1975 was 1,230,299, of whom 95% were being treated as out-patients. Of the estimated (1972) total number of registered patients under treatment in the world, that is 2.8 millions, those who receive treatment through ILEP-sponsored or ILEP-supported programmes account for 42.6%, or 11.4% of the estimated number of persons needing treatment for leprosy. Over half the centres are responsible for domiciliary treatment schemes, and 147 of them are engaged in mass treatment activities, either as part of national programmes or as independent (usually Mission-sponsored) projects.

Rehabilitation plays an important—but subsidiary—role: a quarter of the centres make protective footwear, two-fifths have some kind of physiotherapeutic activity, and reconstructive surgery of various degrees of sophistication is available at one-fifth of the centres.

The Medical Commission, now under the able chairmanship of Professor Michel Lechat, is continuing to mould the attitudes and activities of the Member-Organizations of ILEP, and is especially concerned with the research projects, to which in 1975 the respectable sum of nearly 1,206,000 US \$ was devoted. ILEP helps to fund the IMMLEP Project of the World Health Organization, and is at present exploring the possibility of sponsoring joint leprosy-tuberculosis projects in several countries. The Commission has already alerted Member-Organizations to the grave threat posed to programmes of leprosy treatment and control by the increasing incidence of dapsone-resistance. The advisability and practicability of the integration of leprosy into the general health services continue to be the subject of study by the Commission.