

Letter to the Editor

"Leprosy" in Standard Text Books

As a Field Supervisor, with only 3 years experience behind me, I was, nonetheless astounded to read the following extract on Lepromatous leprosy in *Diseases of the Skin* by H. O. Mackey, revised edition by John P. Mackey 1968.

Page 288.

Nodular Leprosy (Lepromatous Leprosy)

"The nodules called lepromata, appear mostly on the forehead, face, ears and hands. The face becomes deformed and assumes the characteristic 'leonine' appearance.

This is the anergic type with many *M. leprae* and gives a negative reaction to lepromin. It is communicable, and has an unfavourable prognosis. The histopathology shows a granuloma made up mainly of histiocytes which contain clumps of *M. leprae*.

Symptoms. The first signs are a husky voice and a nasal discharge which indicate involvement of the mucous membranes. *A malarial type of fever with wasting and diarrhoea is common. The disease is steadily progressive and death occurs on an average in about 8 years. Some cases live on into old age.*"

The italicized sentences are the cause of my astonishment.

The statement that death occurs on average in about 8 years is absolutely opposed to all the teaching I have received both here in Sierra Leone and in Albert, Ethiopia. The generalization regarding fever, wasting and diarrhoea I cannot say much about. I can only refer to the 57 lepromatous cases under my care and say that I have never seen wasting in any one of them and as for their fever and diarrhoea this has always responded to the appropriate drugs. Only two cases were referred to hospital and this for ENL.

It would appear we stand very little chance of educating the general public about the nature of leprosy, when would be doctors are given this type of information.

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