

Book Reviews

Leprosy in Children, by F. M. Noussitou, in collaboration with H. Sansarricq and J. Walter, with an introduction by S. G. Browne. World Health Organisation, Geneva, 1976. (ISBN 92 1 54053 2), 22 pp. Price Sw. fr. 9.00, U.S. \$3.60.

The official description of this booklet is as follows.

"This book is concerned with the epidemiology, clinical features, diagnosis, classification, treatment and prognosis, as well as psychosociological aspects of leprosy in children. The main points stressed are:

- (1) A significant proportion of all leprosy cases start in childhood;
- (2) practically always, lesions in children are initially benign and bacteriologically negative;
- (3) complete regression with minimal or no sequelae takes place under treatment in a very high proportion of cases. Spontaneous cure is a common feature in infantile leprosy but a significant number of untreated cases evolve to adult forms of the disease with high risk of infectivity and serious disabilities;
- (4) the methodical examination of children, mostly by means of school surveys in leprosy control programmes, has considerable advantages. The book deals with practical problems encountered in the diagnosis of leprosy in children, and the clinical features are illustrated in 13 colour plates."

This is a most valuable booklet, authoritative, attractively presented and illustrated with a series of excellent colour plates. The text, directed to the general practitioner, gives in clear and concise style a balanced and comprehensive account of leprosy in childhood as likely to be seen in general practice and rural survey work. The presentation is up to date, giving commendable space to psycho-social aspects, health education and school surveys. The authors mention the variation in the appearances of leprosy between one part of the world and another. Here there is some orientation towards S.E. Asia, but this if anything is an advantage. Dr Browne has written a valuable Introduction which picks up some points deserving extra emphasis.

The statement that lepromatous leprosy is uncommon before the age of 15 years (p. 14) is matched by only 2 photographs being devoted to this most important type of leprosy, both of them illustrating relatively advanced disease. In the reviewer's experience in Central India, lepromatous leprosy, especially a degeneration from indeterminate and borderline leprosy, was by no means rare in childhood, indeed never less than 40 cases of this, some of them in young children, were in need of close hospital supervision. Photographs of multimacular pre-lepromatous lesions and the earliest stages of lepromatous infiltration and nodulation, e.g. on the earlobe, would have enriched the booklet, with if possible a photograph of juvenile leprosy as described in the Introduction.

The dictum on page 20 suggesting that if in doubt patients should be registered and treated as leprosy cases needs careful reservation. With really careful examination, including close observation of loss of sweating, competent smears, and where very early lepromatous leprosy is in question, careful clinical and bacteriological examination of the nose, the area of doubt becomes very small indeed. This is the type of case in which the judgment of an experienced leprologist is indicated. One does not condemn any child to a long course of therapy without careful judgement, and more emphasis could have been placed on this with advantage.

These are specialized aspects which in no way detract from the value of this excellent booklet to the general practitioner for whom it is intended, and to whom it can be recommended very strongly.

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