

## MEDICAL EXPERIMENTATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

An important Round Table Conference on "Medical experimentation and the protection of human rights" was held in Portugal on 30 November and 1 December under the auspices of the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences. The International Leprosy Association was among the 46 members of the CIOMS represented there — in the person of its Secretary, Dr S. G. Browne, who is a Vice-President of CIOMS. No fewer than 53 countries sent delegates to the Symposium, and WHO, Unesco, the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Holy See were also represented.

The subject of the Round Table was of great interest and importance, since the continued advance of medicine and of research depended on the development of new investigative techniques and new therapies. All these posed potential hazards and risks, and unless the ethical and moral implications of research were recognized and respected, the ultimate gain to humanity might be achieved at too high a price.

The general principles embodied in successive codes (Nuremburg, Helsinki, Tokyo) need to be applied in specific situations, through Review Committees that were usually hospital-based. The Symposium recommended that the ethical issues in medicine should be included in medical curricula and continued in the postgraduate education of the doctor who is often during these formative years confronted by the real problems of professional life and practice.

In leprosy, the ethics of the controlled drug trial, the place of placebos, and the practical difficulties of obtaining true "informed consent" for investigations employing invasive techniques (such as vein puncture, skin smears, biopsies, etc.) or mass treatment programmes would have to be considered in the establishment of general guidelines that could be modified to suit the needs of individual countries and situations.

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## LEPROSY — AND WATER AND SEWAGE

The International Symposium on the Prevention and Control of Water-related Diseases in the Tropics, held in London from 11 to 14 December 1978, under the joint auspices of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, the International Association on Water Pollution Research, and the Institution of Civil Engineers, brought together over 200 experts from over 40 countries. As doctors, engineers, microbiologists, economists, etc., all were concerned in some way with the health of peoples living in the developing countries, and especially with the huge problems of health and hygiene in relation to water. As Dr S. G. Browne (President of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene) said in welcoming Mr John Tomlinson, Under Secretary in the Ministry of Overseas Development, who opened the Symposium, "bringing good water to and taking soiled water from households in the tropics, is the greatest single benefit that Western science and technology could confer peoples of developing countries".

For leprosy workers, the Symposium provided a salutary reminder that

leprosy is but one among many transmissible diseases common in tropical and subtropical countries, and that water-related diseases take a far greater toll in acute and chronic morbidity and mortality than leprosy. Our very preoccupation with a disease whose victims are still far too often neglected should not blind us to the risk that they too run of contracting intercurrently some water-related disease (like intestinal infections and parasites, malaria and filariasis, hepatitis and schistosomiasis), nor to the principal killing, debilitating and maiming diseases that afflict chiefly the populations that are also exposed to leprosy infection.

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