

ERYTHEMA NODOSUM LEPROSUM

Sir,

We were interested to read the hypothesis by Dr Mshana,¹ but his contention that ENL is due to an imbalance of lymphocyte subsets is based on some statements which appear not to be well founded.

1. 'The hallmark of the lesions is perivascularitis'. The authors whom he quotes make it clear that the hallmark of an ENL lesion is polymorph infiltration of a lepromatous macrophage granuloma. Vasculitis is conspicuous in only half the lesions (minor involvement of blood vessels is a universal feature of inflammatory lesions).

2. 'Three patients with tuberculoid leprosy . . . developed the Lucio phenomenon'. This occurrence is quite exceptional and in need of confirmation.

3. 'Uveitis as a complication of leprosy . . . occurs only during ENL'. Yes, but bacilli, sometimes clinically silent, are a frequent finding. It is just such small masses of bacilli, or their antigenic remnant, whether in skin, nerve, muscle, testis, iris or elsewhere, that are almost certainly present at the site of ENL lesions. However, there is a need for further biopsy reports on this point.

4. 'ENL-like lesions do not develop in leishmaniasis'. In cutaneous leishmaniasis necrotizing reactions with polymorph infiltration are a common event, and as in ENL perhaps, their initiation is dependent on a moderate parasite load, neither too high or too low.²

Evidence of the regular presence of extravascular immune complexes at the site of ENL lesions awaits publication. But why do many immunologists pay so little attention to histology? And why do they often appear to neglect the over-riding importance of antigenic load and antigen-antibody ratios? The significance of the latter in the determination of necrosis in mycobacterial immune complex granulomas is the subject in another recent study.³

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References

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- ² Ridley DS. The pathogenesis of cutaneous leishmaniasis. *Trans Roy Soc Trop Med Hyg*, 1979; 72: 150-60.
- ³ Ridley MJ, Marianayagam Y, Spector WG. Experimental granulomas induced by mycobacterial immune complexes in rats. *J Path*, 1982; 136: 59-72.