

Letters to the Editor

THE MONTHLY SUPERVISION OF ANTI-LEPROSY DRUGS IN THE AMAZONAS STATE OF BRAZIL

Sir,

I have recently returned to this country after working for 2 years in the Southern part of the State of Amazonas in Brazil. The State covers an area of 1,558,987 km² and the population at the end of 1981 was 1.5 million, of whom 15,767 were registered as having leprosy. The part in which I worked covered about 204,800 km² with a population of 140,000, amongst whom were 1487 cases of leprosy at the end of 1981—a figure which is acknowledged by local experts to fall far short of the real extent of the problem. Although we had some problems with accurate classification, my understanding is that approximately 38% of all new cases registered in 1981 were lepromatous or 'dimorphous' and under the latter term, many cases would conform to the B (borderline) classification of the Madrid system.

In view of the recommendations which have recently been made by the World Health Organization for multiple drug therapy in all forms of leprosy, including the supervision of monthly rifampicin in both pauci- and multi-bacillary patients, and clofazimine in multi-bacillary cases, I thought it might be worth recording that in the above area (and almost certainly in many parts of Brazil, and South America generally), we were extremely lucky to see our patients twice a year, despite constant travelling. In fact, under such conditions, and with various other problems concerning transport and the availability and distribution of drugs, we did not consider it wise even to attempt multiple drug therapy in the area described. One wonders how 'monthly supervision' is to be accomplished in other parts of the world, where distances are enormous and health services poorly developed? In the area where I was working it will be a long time before anything like monthly supervision becomes practicable. The development of health care structures and practical advice to resolve this sort of problem would be at least as valuable as some of the scientific and research projects which currently attract so much attention and money.

M N POWELL