

LIPIDS AND LEPROSY

Sir,

I was very interested to read Sritharan's article 'High density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C) analysis in leprosy patients' (*Lepr Rev* 1984; **55**: 167-71). On relatively small numbers of individuals they have been able to show a significant difference in HDL-C and the HDL-C/TC (total cholesterol) ratio between lepromatous patients (both treated and untreated) and controls. If these results can be repeated in other studies and in other parts of the world it would suggest that the area of lipid metabolism and immune response to *Mycobacterium leprae* might be a fruitful area for research. There is already considerable interest in mycobacterial lipids.^{1,2}

It is interesting to note in Sritharan's study that there is a general rise in TC, HDL-C and the HDL-C/TC ratio with age. In western populations it has been consistently shown that while TC levels tend to rise with age,³ the HDL-C remains static with the result that the HDL-C/TC ratio falls as age increases.⁴

W C S SMITH

*Cardiovascular Epidemiology Unit
Ninewells Hospital and Medical School
Dundee DD1 9SY*

References

- ¹ Brennan PJ, Barrow WW. Evidence for species-specific lipid antigens in mycobacterium leprae. *Int J Lepr*, 1980; **48**: 382-7.
- ² Young DB. Detection of mycobacterial lipids in skin biopsies from leprosy patients. *Int J Lepr*, 1981; **49**: 198-204.
- ³ Miller NE. Why does plasma low density lipoprotein concentration in adults increase with age. *Lancet*, 1984; **1**: 263-7.
- ⁴ Williams P, Robinson D, Bailey A. High density lipoprotein and coronary risk factors in normal men. *Lancet*, 1979; **1**: 72-5.