

'ERADICATION' OF LEPROSY FROM MALTA

Sir,

I am consultant dermatologist to the Medical and Health Department in Valletta. My patients come from all strata of society in Malta and Gozo. I was not fortunate enough to attend the Symposium on Multidrug Therapy in Leprosy which was held in Wurzburg between 24–26 April 1986. Nevertheless, I was surprised to read in the official programme that delegates at the meeting spoke in terms of successful eradication of leprosy from Malta. I would not wish your readers to take this statement too literally because at the Department of Dermatology in the past 3 years we have diagnosed 4 patients with multibacillary leprosy who had previously been seen at other sections where the true nature of their illness had gone unrecognized. Perhaps I need not mention also that some of the 200-odd patients currently on our leprosy register, though bacteriologically negative, are still struggling with the long term sequelae of the disease which unfortunately makes them prone to ostracism from the rest of the community.

We in Malta owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Enno Freerksen, his German colleagues, and their local collaborators Dr E Bonnici and Dr G Depasquale for their sterling and innovative work. In my opinion, however, their approach lacked two important aspects, namely an active case-

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finding programme, and intensive education of local doctors and paramedics to facilitate early diagnosis. Waiting, as they normally do, for patients to be referred to them they can never be in a position to claim that leprosy has been eradicated in Malta.

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