

ECHO FOR LEPROSY

Sir,

Irene Brightmer, in *Lepr Rev*, 1987; **58**: 69–78, describing a spatial study of leprosy in Cross River State, Nigeria, concludes that a fresh approach is needed, involving education, a steady reliable flow of all necessary drugs and involvement of people at the village level. With such conclusions governments worldwide would agree. I would specially emphasize her second concluding point in which she states:

‘a steady and reliable flow of all necessary drugs must be assured. A means must also be found of making the new multiple drug therapy more widely available and this will require the development of techniques to make it simple to administer.’

ECHO (the supply of Equipment to Charity Hospitals Overseas) is a charitable agency whose purpose is to supply the best quality pharmaceuticals and medical equipment at the lowest prices to mission and voluntary hospitals all over the world. The biggest growth in ECHO's pharmaceutical programme has been in the supply of leprosy drugs and by 1980 some 260 million dapsone tablets were being manufactured annually for ECHO for world leprosy needs.

The awareness in the 1970s of the worldwide problem of drug resistance in leprosy and of the need to implement multiple drug therapy has produced both a new urgency and a new financial constraint. The urgency is to treat patients with a full course of multiple drug therapy with the highest patient compliance and the lowest default rate possible in order to avoid drug resistance. The financial constraint is that of the actual cost of multiple drug therapy. In the light of these facts it is at once more important and more difficult to assure a steady and reliable flow of all necessary leprosy drugs.

ECHO supplies 1900 mission and voluntary hospitals in 120 countries and, by virtue of its bulk purchase of leprosy drugs, is able to obtain very favourable discounts and to pass these on to leprosy programmes worldwide.

During a three-month period this year ECHO has despatched very large quantities of dapsone, clofazimine and rifampicin overseas in response to orders received. Countries to which these leprosy drugs have been sent are Bhutan, Burma, India, Korea, Laos, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Thailand and Uganda. It is ECHO's privilege and task to supply leprosy workers with the drugs required for the enormous but finite task of treatment and control of leprosy worldwide.

In addition to the supply of leprosy drugs ECHO supplies medical and surgical equipment which is of low cost, robust, of good quality and appropriate technology. Orthopaedic and reconstructive surgical equipment can be ordered through ECHO, and one of the most popular tools for laboratory work (as in the examination of leprosy smears) is the ECHO Alpha microscope, made to ECHO's specifications and field tested and proved in remote rural situations.

In recent years one of the most urgent and frequently recurring requests to ECHO has been for vehicles. This need has occurred especially in rural health programmes. Such transport needs are specially relevant to leprosy survey and control work with the typical pattern of a wide network of clinics in relation to a central clinic or small hospital. Such has been the interest and demand that ECHO have, this year, established a Land Rover department. Diesel and petrol Land Rovers of right- or left-hand drive are built up in ECHO's workshop to an 'as new' specification. The recipient receives a vehicle as good as new—and better in the sense that it is purpose built. At the outset when an order for one of the Land Rovers is received by ECHO the person making the order indicates his or her requirements. The order form has space to indicate preference for left- or right-hand drive, for stretcher fittings, for tropicalization of the roof, for additional winch, air-conditioning of the driver's compartment, colour of bodywork, and signs, markings or logos to be painted on the vehicle. These vehicles sell for between £6,400 and £6,700.

Whether leprosy drugs, medical and surgical equipment or Land Rovers are purchased, ECHO has its own freight department with expertise in sea and airfreight, sea and air mail and documentation. We would encourage those interested who are visiting the UK to spend a few hours with us at Coulsdon viewing the warehouse, stocks, facilities and meeting our staff.

It is ECHO's aim to equip leprosy staff and other health workers with essential tools for the job. Further details of ECHO's services are available on request.

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