

COMMENT: REVERSAL REACTIONS IN LEPROSY AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

Sir,

As members of the medical profession, we were very pleased to read your editorial: 'Reversal Reactions in Leprosy . . .', by Dr Patricia Rose and Dr M. F. R. Waters (Volume 62, no. 2, June 1991). The subject has long demanded the attention it was given in this authoritative article. However, we would like to make the following comments:

We agree that early diagnosis of nerve damage is very important. Nevertheless, we also think that it is also very important to include an early nerve damage detection test, i.e. sensation tests (ST). We feel it should receive attention with voluntary muscle tests (VMT), and before a motor-conducted velocity test (MCV).

We think that both STs and VMTs, in hospital and field settings should be researched, because, providing techniques are accurate, these tests have proved reliable measures of changing nerve function. Naturally, examining techniques and record-keeping should be as objective as possible, but, in our experience, we have noticed they are particularly prone to error in field settings. We agree that increased awareness should be brought to leprosy control staff as we believe reversal reactions (RR) are most effectively managed using a team approach. Prevention of disability (POD) staff should have specific repeated training, with emphasis placed on keeping regular, accurately recorded results using individual patient forms. In this way, changes can be measured and appropriate treatment regimens carried out accordingly.

After the acute phase has passed, appropriate management of early nerve damage usually necessitates the strengthening and re-education of weakened muscles. We feel it is important to mention this in the area of RR management because, even though nerve function may partially or completely recover, the patient who does not receive adequate advice regarding exercises for hypertrophy specific muscle fibres may still be left with a useless, atrophic hand.

We hope you agree with our comments and we wait with anticipation for your 'reversed reaction'!

*LCC Zone 6
P.O. Box 58
Khon Kaen 40000
Thailand*

FIONA McCUSKER
P A M SCHREUDER