

News and Notes

‘Can leprosy be eradicated from India?’

This is the title of an interesting and provocative publication by Prakash Kotecha and Trudy Harpham, respectively from the Medical College, Baroda, Gujarat, India and the Health Policy Unit, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London. It appears in *Health Policy and Planning* **6**(1), 82–5 (1991) and draws attention to an ‘overzealous political commitment’ to the eradication of leprosy in India, in the face of numerous medical, technical and operational constraints. Recommendations are made for a more realistic concept of controlling rather than eradicating leprosy from India.

TDR and IDRC prize for a paper on ‘Women and tropical diseases’

‘Leprosy in women: characteristics and repercussions’ was the title of the paper that won for its team the first US\$5000 prize offered by TDR and Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC) for the best paper on women and tropical diseases.

The members of the winning team, all women and all from the Instituto de Biomedicina in Caracas, were Marian Ulrich, Ana Maria Zulueta, Gisela Caceres-Dittmar, Celsa Sampson, Maria Eugenia Pinardi, Elsa M. Rada and Nacarid Aranzazu. A total of 35 papers were submitted from 20 countries; over half of the first authors were female and over two-thirds were from developing countries.

The selection committee chose the Venezuelan team’s paper because it covered several aspects—physiological, social and biomedical. It outlined risk factors not only in pregnancy but at all stages of a woman’s life; described the impact of the disease on the overall quality of her life; and was extremely well written.

The Centre also highly commended 4 other papers: ‘Adam’s rib awry: women and schistosomiasis’ by Edward H Michelson of Bethesda (MD), USA; ‘Women and malaria by R Reubin of Madurai, India; ‘Women, tropical diseases: leprosy’ by Elizabeth Duncan of Edinburgh, Scotland, U.K.; and ‘A synoptic inventory of needs for research on women and tropical parasitic diseases with an application to schistosomiasis’ by Hermann Feldmeier and Ingela Krantz of Göteborg, Sweden. Of the ‘TDR diseases’ the most popular were malaria, leprosy and schistosomiasis. Only 1 paper stressed the social and economic factors that oppress women and contribute to their poor health.

Medical students survey eye damage in Calcutta

Leprosy sufferers, totalling 750,000, are blinded by the disease through paralysis of the muscles controlling the eyelids. This is a dreadful complication as sightless people usually compensate by relying on other senses, but leprosy patients who have lost their sensation in hands and feet find themselves doubly disadvantaged.

Since 1983 a World Health Organization survey on eye damage in leprosy patients has been carried out in many countries with the aim of detecting problems and preventing blindness. This has been co-ordinated by Timothy fytche, Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon at St Thomas’s Hospital, London. Until now this survey work has not been conducted in Calcutta—but in November 1992 two students from St Thomas’s Hospital Medical School will be carrying out initial research there.

Mohua Jain and Aparna Prinja have been sponsored by LEpra's Elective Student Programme (where grants are made, generally to cover air fare, to about 30 students per year engaged in leprosy work). They will be based at the Greater Calcutta Leprosy Treatment and Health Education Scheme Centre. Difficulties in communicating with patients should be largely overcome as both women have a good knowledge of Bengali/Hindi languages. This may also mean that they will be able to discover more detailed information about patients than might otherwise be possible.

It is hoped that follow-up surveys may be arranged for Calcutta in future, but in the meantime Aparna and Mohua's findings are awaited with great interest.

Second Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific

The Second International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific will take place in New Delhi, India, 8–12 November 1992.

The theme of the conference is 'The Reality, the Challenge and the Opportunity'.

The conference will emphasize that the reality is that there are a number of countries, such as Thailand and India, that are already experiencing major epidemics and that many other countries have rapidly increasing numbers of HIV infected individuals. It will also emphasize the obvious challenge, not only to learn from what has happened in the rest of the world but to implement strategies to minimize the spread of HIV. Finally the conference will highlight the unique opportunities many countries in the region have that may enable them to avoid being embroiled in this tragic epidemic. It is sponsored by The Government of India, and The All India Institute of Medical Sciences, together with The World Health Organization and The AIDS Society for Asia and the Pacific (ASAP). Further information can be obtained from: Professor John M Dwyer, Chairman, AIDS Society for Asia and the Pacific, Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick, NSW 2031, Australia (FAX-612 398 9887).

International Colloquium on Integration of traditional and modern methods in the control of leprosy and in the study of mycobacterial taxonomy, Antwerp, Belgium, 16–19 December 1992

The above International Colloquium will be held at the Institute of Tropical Medicine Prince Leopold in Antwerp, 16–19 December 1992. It is organized in conjunction with the 13th conference of the IWGMT (International Working Group on Mycobacterial Taxonomy) and has 2 parts:

- (1) 16 December: Integration of traditional and modern methods in the Control of Leprosy;
- (2) 17–19 December: IWGMT Conference on Integration of traditional and modern methods in the study of Mycobacterial Taxonomy.

The official language of the Colloquium will be English.

Persons who wish to attend the Colloquium and authors who wish to present a paper on Wednesday 16 December, or a poster on Friday afternoon, 18 December, are invited to register their name and address, and to submit a title as soon as possible. A very limited number of short presentations may also be accepted for the plenary sessions of the IWGMT on 17 and 18 December. These will be restricted to papers relating to the following themes in mycobacterial systematics: 1 Phylogenetic relationships, 2 Identification methods and strategies, and 3 Ecology and epidemiology. More details will be sent to those who have indicated their intention to participate.

The organizing committee is composed of Professor L Eyckmans, Professor F Portaels (Antwerp, Belgium) and Dr L G Wayne (Long Beach, USA).

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