

## DELUSIONAL PARASITOSIS IN LEPROSY

Sir,

Delusional parasitosis is a psychocutaneous disorder, occasionally found to be associated with systemic diseases<sup>1</sup>, such as pellagra, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, cerebrovascular disease, disseminated sclerosis, severe renal disease, neurosyphilis and temporal lobe epilepsy.

The feeling of insects crawling under the skin has been reported by many patients of leprosy in India<sup>2</sup>. We have seen three cases of delusional parasitosis, who were later detected to have leprosy.<sup>3-5</sup> The delusion was discrete, systematized and the patients responded to pimozide (4–12 mg/day) within 3 months of treatment. One patient relapsed within 2 weeks of stopping pimozide of her own accord but again responded within 1 month on restarting the drug.

The exact mechanism, of the evolution of the delusional system in leprosy is not known. One hypothesis is that these patients develop a profound inability to discriminate between normal and abnormal somatic sensations and the delusion may be mediated by limbic system dysfunction. This dysfunction may be the result of overactivity of the dopaminergic system as evidence by the efficacy of the specific dopamine antagonist pimozide<sup>1</sup>, leprosy is essentially a disease of the peripheral nerves and does not involve the central nervous system, but in it, neuritic manifestations may be acting as a trigger for the development of delusion of parasitosis.

*Department of Psychiatry*  
*UCMS & GTB Hospital*  
*Shahdara, Delhi-110095, India*

M. S. BHATIA AND SABITA SHOME

*Department of Dermatology*  
*Dr R.M.L. Hospital,*  
*New Delhi-110001, India*

R. K. GAUTAM

### References

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