

COMMENT: NEWLY 'REGISTERED' VS 'DIAGNOSED' LEPROSY PATIENTS IN THE LITERATURE

Sir,

While going through the various articles I find that a slight difference in the language, knowingly or unknowingly, makes a big difference in the interpretation of the data. I refer to an interesting article¹ in which the authors have reported disabilities in 260 new and previously untreated patients who presented at the clinics. In the methodology they have specified that these were newly-diagnosed leprosy patients. Those of us who work in the field know that many of such patients have been diagnosed as cases of leprosy by general practitioners or healers but have not taken specific treatment so far. Unless a specific inquiry is made one should call these patients as newly-registered cases rather than newly-diagnosed cases. This makes a lot of difference to the health planners. Twenty-one percent grade II disability in newly-diagnosed cases, where a leprosy control programme is in operation, shows that the survey component has been very poor and needs strengthening. If these patients were newly registered but were diagnosed earlier indicates that there are strong social and cultural factors which are not allowing the patient to accept this as disease and take proper medical treatment. Here we need to bring a change in attitude by appropriate health education.

Our comments do not pertain only to the article referred to but to all such reportings which should specify if the cases were newly diagnosed or newly registered. If these patients knew about

the disease earlier, it is important to record the time gap between diagnosis and registration and reasons for this.

*Department of PSM
Institute of Medical Sciences
Banaras Hindu University
Varanasi 221005, India*

PARAMJIT KAUR

Reference

- ¹ Schipper A, Lubbers WJ, Hogeweg Margreet, de Soldenhoff R. Disabilities of hands, feet and eyes in newly-diagnosed leprosy patients in Eastern Nepal. *Lepr Rev* 1994; **65**: 239–247.