

## Editor's Choice

Clinicians treating mycobacterial diseases are all familiar with the anxiety that their treated patients may relapse with fresh disease. The apparent success of dapsone monotherapy in the 1950s was clouded by the presentation from the late 1960s onwards of relapse cases. The memories of these late relapses have made many leprologists feel cautious about the World Health Organization's Multi Drug Therapy (WHO-MDT) and not fully confident that six or twenty-four months treatment is adequate. This issue of *Leprosy Review* takes several different looks at the problem of relapse.

In an editorial Desikan (page 114) reviews the WHO data on relapse after MDT pointing out that in a large data set there has been very little evidence that the relapse after MDT is an important clinical problem. However the report from West Africa of a 20% relapse rate in patients with an initial Bacterial Index above 4 is worrying and emphasizes the importance of identifying patients who may be at greater risk of relapse and following these patients closely.

On page 131 Shetty *et al.* demonstrate that acid-fast bacilli can be cultured from peripheral nerve biopsies of patients who have completed a twenty-four month course of MDT. The culture technique used was very sensitive and involved using immunosuppressed mice. It is also important to note that there was no histopathological evidence of active disease. These data clearly demonstrate that bacilli can persist in the nerve, we do not know whether this is clinically important and how much late bacterial clearance occurs by immune mechanisms.

In this issue we are starting a case report section which we hope will encourage young clinicians to write up cases that have a particular clinical lesson. Two of our first case reports concern post-MDT treatment problems.

The role of peripheral nerve surgery in leprosy is a contentious topic. Bernardin and Thomas report on a new classification of nerve involvement at operation (page 147). I hope that this will stimulate surgical discussion and perhaps even a trial evaluating these criteria.

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