

COMMENT: LEPROSY, HIV INFECTION AND LEPRO REACTIONS

Editor,

It was interesting to read the case reports of lepro reactions occurring in HIV-seropositive multibacillary leprosy patients (*Lepr Rev*, 1998; **69**: 173–177). The report raises two controversial points.

1. In each of the three cases, reversal reaction has been diagnosed on the basis of clinical findings and a single biopsy picture each of skin and nerve lesions. On this basis, it would have been more appropriate to refer to them as type-1 lepro reactions rather than reversal reactions. These reactions could have been downgrading reactions, as there is no record of pre-reaction biopsy and further biopsy was not carried out after the reaction subsided. In the early and acute reactions, it is not possible to know by the histological picture whether the patient is upgrading, downgrading or neither.¹ It is obviously easier to determine the course of reaction if a pre-reaction biopsy is available for comparison. The reported cases may have been of downgrading reactions which were controlled with the treatment given. Lepromin positivity during reaction is not an absolute proof of reversal, as the lepromin test could have been more strongly positive earlier.

2. The authors state that the occurrence of reversal reaction in HIV-seropositive patients is paradoxical. It is not so because in the early stages of HIV infection, the CD4 cell count may be more or less normal and some degree of immune competence is retained. The immune function gradually deteriorates till the patient develops full-blown acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). Occurrence of a reversal reaction in a patient with full-blown AIDS would definitely be a paradox, but not so in the early stages of HIV infection. None of the reported patients apparently had reached the stage of full-blown AIDS. Moreover, the authors have not reported on the CD4 + cell counts of these patients, which would have given some indication of the degree of immune dysfunction.

Skin Clinic
Runwal Raisonni Plaza
41/12, Karve Road
Pune 411004, India

ANIL H. PATKI

Reference

¹ Ridley DS. Reactions. In: *Skin biopsy in leprosy*, third edition. Ciba-Geigy Limited, Basle, 1990: 53–58.