

Letters to the Editor

‘WALL JOURNAL’ ON LEPROSY – A NOVEL METHOD TO EDUCATE MEDICAL STUDENTS

Editor,

The concept of leprosy management as a whole has changed in recent times in tune with the various operational and basic studies that are being conducted all over the world. Advances in the fields of chemotherapy, microbiology, operational aspects and rehabilitation have taken place rapidly during the past few years. We believe that the teaching medical colleges play an important role in building the health capacities needed for achieving the Alma Ata declaration of ‘Health for All’ by 2000 AD. Since the concepts and strategies of managing leprosy are changing so fast, the pace of keeping abreast the knowledge of medical students on many aspects is slow even today. Current knowledge regarding leprosy management has still not been adopted into the curriculum of the teaching medical colleges.

In order to provide updated information on leprosy, Bombay Leprosy Project (BLP) started the new concept of the ‘Wall Journal’, (WJ), which has been displayed in four medical colleges in Bombay every month since July 1991. Issues include research articles, case reports of academic interest, summary of papers presented in national and international conferences and recent publications on leprosy, besides articles on general health including TB and AIDS. The staff of the project selected the material from the literature as well as BLP’s own contributions. Computers, photocopier and color photographs were freely used to make the displays attractive and arresting (Table 1).

The primary objective of this academic activity ranges from kindling an interest for leprosy in the minds of clinical undergraduate novices to honing and upgrading the knowledge of post-graduates and faculty members directly responsible for patient care as well as teaching. In order to assess its impact whether the WJ has fulfilled its objectives or otherwise, a questionnaire study was conducted.

Material and methods

For the questionnaire study, two groups of respondents were selected:

A. UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL STUDENTS

Undergraduate medical students who had completed either a Skin & VD term or at least medicine and surgery term so as to be exposed to the clinical aspects of leprosy. The respective medical college enrollment register was consulted and the students who had completed one term of the second year were assigned numbers. The list of students was sorted out by name in an alphabetical order. All students from this sorted list were selected for the study. They were personally approached and requested to fill in the questionnaire. No questionnaires were sent by post or e-mail and the questionnaires were collected on the same day.

Table 1. Location of Wall Journal in medical colleges

| Site no. | Name of medical college | Location | Started since |
|----------|--|----------------|---------------|
| 1 | Lokmaniya Tilak Memorial Medical College, Bombay | PSM Dept | July 1991 |
| 2 | Grant Medical College, Bombay | Skin & VD Dept | October 1993 |
| 3 | Topiwala National Medical College, Bombay | PSM Dept | October 1993 |
| 4 | Seth G.S. Medical College, Bombay | Library | May 1994 |

B. POSTGRADUATE AND FACULTY

Postgraduates and faculty who were directly involved in patient care were interviewed. A list of postgraduate students and the faculty members from the respective departments was obtained and the names sorted according to alphabetical order. Every fifth person was selected for the study. The procedure followed was same as for the undergraduates.

The questions ranged from preliminary information regarding how useful the information was, to the location of the WJ. Out of 80 individuals (50 undergraduates and 30 postgraduates) who were asked to fill the questionnaire, 10 declined to respond, giving a response rate of 87.5%. The questionnaire comprised eight open-ended questions. The responses were analysed. All the respondents were aware of the WJ before filling the questionnaire and the responses were graded as 1) useful, 2) satisfactory and 3) not helpful.

Results

1. Eighty to 90% of the respondents found that the WJ was useful in their academic research work and also to prepare for the leprosy competitive examination. However 60–70% felt the need for more pictures and clinically oriented material. Twenty percent thought that the contents of WJ should be comprehensive enough to enable them to read the material displayed in the shortest possible time.
2. Ninety percent of the respondents observed that the WJ should be located at a central and most frequented place such as the library and corridor of the seminar or conference halls. While 90% of the respondents thought that the ideal location for display of WJ was near the library, 80% suggested that it could also be displayed near the General Medical and Surgical Outpatient Departments. Only 2% thought that the WJ should be displayed in their own department.
3. Ten percent of the respondents thought that the quality of the WJ content should be upgraded so as to make it more attractive.
4. All the respondents strongly emphasized the need to continue the WJ, which has become one of the important sources of information about leprosy.

Bombay Leprosy Project
 11 Vn Purav Marg
 Sion-Chunabhatti
 Mumbai-22, India

GAURANG SHAH
 V.V. PAI
 C.R. REVANKAR
 R. GANAPATI