

CORRESPONDENCE

This department is for the publication of informal communications that are of interest because they are informative and stimulating, and for the discussion of controversial matters. The mandate of this JOURNAL is to disseminate information relating to leprosy in particular and also other mycobacterial diseases. Dissident comment or interpretation on published research is of course valid, but personality attacks on individuals would seem unnecessary. Political comments, valid or not, also are unwelcome. They might result in interference with the distribution of the JOURNAL and thus interfere with its prime purpose.

The Teaching of Leprosy in Medical Schools: Four and One-Half Hours in Three Years

TO THE EDITOR:

We have read with great interest the editorial entitled "Has Leprosy Come of Age?", by Roger K. Ackley (Int. J. Lepr. 47 [1979] 608-609), in which he refers to the fact that a recent survey of 106 medical schools in India indicated that the average time spent on leprosy is four and one-half hours during the three year period. One of us (AGMW) has just returned from a month in India during which it was possible to meet and talk with doctors and others who are involved in leprosy control, and this experience amply confirms that—with a few exceptions—there are serious defects in the teaching of leprosy in medical schools in India. Whilst this does not reflect well on those who allocate time in the medical curriculum to a disease of prime importance (India has an estimated 3.2 million cases of leprosy), we believe that the situation is not much better in most parts of Africa where leprosy is endemic. Furthermore, we strongly suspect that the teaching of this subject is defective in universities in other parts of the world where this disease is of major public health importance.

Our main reason for this communication is to express the view that Roger Ackley's editorial raises a matter of fundamental importance if progress is to be made in leprosy control. We have both been engaged in research for the better part of 20 years and fully appreciate the necessity to strive for advance in areas which include *in vitro*

culture, better animal models, a vaccine, more effective drugs, and a better understanding of adverse reactions. We note, however, that progress in several of these subjects is disappointingly slow. Another matter of concern is that even if research achieves a dramatic breakthrough in the near future, it is likely to encounter a vast hiatus of suitably motivated and trained people to apply it in the field.

Four and a half hours is not enough. We believe that the prospects for leprosy control will be substantially improved if adequate attention and time is given to the teaching of this subject in all medical faculties in leprosy-endemic areas. Although a great deal of initial work would be necessary, together with constant follow-up and encouragement, such a program of teaching would not require great expenditure on equipment or staff. We submit that much of the work might in fact be initiated by voluntary agencies with a direct interest in leprosy control.

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