

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.

Leprosy Eradication in the Developing Countries: The Required Necessary Foundation

TO THE EDITOR:

Health for all by the year 2000 is the new slogan, and really in 19 years a lot can be done by concerted effort to put mankind on the right orbit to achieving a greater degree of resistance to many diseases.

Research in leprosy has not yielded as much dividend as had been expected, and this is because the leprosy bacillus is a most complex organism to deal with. A recent revelation by Dr. R. J. W. Rees at the last seminar hosted by the Armauer Hansen Research Institute at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, (27–30 October 1980) that he and Dr. Convit independently have observed two growth curves for *Mycobacterium leprae*, suggesting two strains of *M. leprae*, went to dampen our hopes the more. Nevertheless, it underscores the degree of complexity the leprosy bacillus can display, and therefore the amount of concerted, constructive effort needed before achieving a definite goal.

But there are two major problems we in the developing countries have, and which many investigators have, for a long time, underestimated: these are nutrition and tolerably good living conditions. We all know

that an undernourished individual is immunologically incompetent in warding off infections. It is the poor, less privileged ones in the community, particularly those living in slum areas with poorly ventilated houses, who are most susceptible to leprosy infection.

A lot of energy has been expended in the explorative activities of vaccine production in leprosy, and maybe we shall have great expectation! However, since the developing countries harbor nearly all the world's reservoir of leprosy bacilli, what the developed and developing countries should concentrate on now, at least for the next 19 years, is improvement in the nutrition and accommodations of the poor communities of leprosy stricken areas of the world.

If this is done, then the vaccine production would have a fertile soil, and the overall resistance to diseases in 2000, at least in the developing countries, would be more encouraging.

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Name Changes Reflect Trends

TO THE EDITOR:

Under the above caption the INTERNATIONAL REHABILITATION REVIEW (4 [1980] 6) published an editorial, the first paragraph

of which reads: "Recently, some of the older service organizations in the field of disability prevention and rehabilitation have begun to adopt name changes which reflect

the modern sensibilities towards promotion of the dignity of people with disabilities. Examples are the U.S. National Easter Seal Society, Inc., which in 1980 dropped "for Crippled Children and Adults" from its name; the Polish Society for Preventing and Combatting Disability, changed from the Society for Rehabilitation of the Disabled; and the U.S. National Association for Retarded Citizens, changed from Retarded Children a few years ago."

As regards the newly established organizations the trend in naming them "appears to be either to emphasize their control by disabled people (examples follow) or to de-emphasize the association with disability" (examples follow). In the last paragraph it is stated that "All of these possibilities reflect positive attempts to project new images into the public consciousness of disability."

To the examples given by the REVIEW, many others might be added. For instance, the unbecoming word "deaf" has been dropped by the New York League for the Hard of Hearing Persons, "with good results," as reported by Warfield (*Keep Listening*, New York: Viking Press, 1957), cited by Goffman (*Stigma-Notes in the Management of Spoiled Identity*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1963). "Sexually transmitted diseases" is the term now internationally recommended to replace the former stigmatizing "venereal."

It is clear, therefore, that doctors, sociologists, writers, educators, and patients who, for over a half-century, have been protesting against stigmatization of human beings with the "labels of primary force" which are "leprosy" and its companion-pejorative "leper" were on the right way.

I am hoping that the problems caused by those labels are seriously taken into consideration by the International Leprosy Association and by the World Health Organization, considering also that the stigma and the shame of "leprosy" are the prin-

cipal causes that drive patients and contacts into hiding and out of control.

May I take advantage of this space to suggest that persons and organizations that have been fighting for the dignity of patients and their families write to the Ministério da Saúde and Ministério da Previdência e Assistência Social (both in Brasilia, Brazil); Ministério de Assuntos Sociais (Lisbon, Portugal); Ministério de Previsión Social y Salud Publica (La Paz, Bolivia); U.S. Public Health Service (Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.); Public Health Service of Jamaica (Kingston, Jamaica); Public Health Service of Trinidad-Tobago (Port of Spain, Tobago); and to Signore Presidente della Repubblica Italiana (Palazzo Quirinale, Rome, Italy), congratulating them on the official banishment of the words "lepra," "leprosy" and "lebbra," "the most negative of all medical terms," according to an extensive study by Rolston and Chesteen ("The identification of psychosocial factors related to the rehabilitation of leprosy patients," Louisiana State University, School of Social Welfare, Baton Rouge, U.S.A., 1970). Congratulations are also in order to Dr. John R. Trautman, for his successful efforts to change the name of the "U.S. Public Health Service Hospital" to "National Hansen's Disease Center" (Carville, Louisiana 70721, U.S.A.); to Mr. Louis Boudreaux and the editorial staff of THE STAR for their long-time activities "radiating the light of truth on Hansen's disease" (Carville, Louisiana 70721, U.S.A.); and to Dr. Oliver W. Hasselblad (6125 South Pilgrim St., Seattle, Washington 98118, U.S.A.) for his active cooperation in implanting a new terminology in Jamaica.

—Prof. Abrahão Rotberg

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