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EDITORIALS

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UNIFORMITY OF RECORDS

The importance of uniformity in the recording of histories and other details of cases of leprosy was stressed by the Leonard Wood Memorial Conference held at Manila three years ago.* Special importance attaches to this in lands where leprosy work is still in its infancy and where, therefore, local standard methods of recording have not yet been worked out.

The Manila conference proposed that the Health Organization of the League of Nations should collect forms that are in use in various countries and prepare standard methods of recording that might be adopted generally. It was understood that the organization named was in a peculiarly favorable position to do this work; but while the matter has doubtless not been forgotten, other seemingly more important matters have absorbed its attention and so far, after three years, we appear to be no nearer any deliverance on the subject. Undoubtedly, there should be in the hands of those who are responsible

* Leonard Wood Memorial Conference, Report of. Philippine Jour. Sci. 44 (1931) 449.

for treatment a uniform method of recording, one that would permit making data for statistical comparison available to those studying the epidemiology of this disease.

Comparatively little has been done in the study of the epidemiology of leprosy on a modern, scientific basis, and there is much to be done. Our knowledge of the factors responsible for the spread of the disease, and of the question whether these are the same in different countries, is strangely lacking after so many years given to the study of leprosy. More is known as to the age incidence of the disease, at least in some areas, but whether it is universally true that the heaviest incidence is always in the early years of life remains to be confirmed. In any case the occurrence of leprosy in later life requires a fuller explanation than merely predicating an exceptionally long incubation period.

Further, the clinical results of treatment and their permanence or otherwise are matters of the greatest importance; and information on these points is dependent on a better system of recording than is common in most countries, and on a follow-up—a feature which seems to break down nearly everywhere. This matter of the permanence of arrest in leprosy is of very great significance and, reading between the lines of recent papers, one is led to wonder whether the great difference in the matter of estimates of "cure" does not depend as much on economic and social factors inherent to the position of discharged cases as on the continued presence of unrecognized active leprosy bacilli at the time of discharge. If we compare—and more and more the comparison seems a fair one—the disease of leprosy with its near relation, tuberculosis, we shall have to acknowledge that if arrested cases of the latter disease were returned to conditions similar to those too often found among discharged lepers the number of relapses would be enormously increased.

These and many other questions which at present are obscure could at least be brought nearer to solution by the efficient use of uniform, well-devised methods of recording. It would seem that if a fraction of the energy spent on bacteriological investigations in leprosy were devoted to questions of its epidemiology, it might well be that quicker returns of valuable knowledge as to the factors involved in the leprosy problem would be made.

One comes back, therefore, to the question of uniform and standard methods of recording and the pressing need of them which, as has been said, is especially felt in countries where leprosy work is in

its infancy and where workers are waiting for a definite lead in this matter. The question is raised whether it is not an entirely proper and appropriate function of the International Leprosy Association to deal with matters such as this—whether it is necessary to delegate it to other hands, however able. The writer feels that the Association undoubtedly might do this work, and these remarks are written with the hope that the Council may see its way to take up the problem. It should arrange with some of its eminent members to undertake the task of preparing forms that would provide some common factor in the study of the epidemiology of leprosy on its clinical side.

J. L. M.
