

ROLE OF THE PRIVATE PHYSICIAN

TO THE EDITOR:

Although for a long time I have had no connection with the official leprosy service, I am still interested in the problems of leprosy. In my work in private practice I am becoming more and more convinced that the function of the private practitioner is of exceptional importance, and that it is only

through him that real benefits can be obtained when, for one reason or another, patients avoid contact with the public health services. Those services are usually resorted to only in the advanced stages of the disease, when treatment becomes quite ineffective.

To aid the private physician in treating leprosy patients there should be available a resumé of practical leprology, containing only the basic information needed for the private care of the patient. This little book should carefully avoid terminology, such as the word "leper" (*leproso*), which would maintain the unfortunate prejudices that surround this disease in the popular mind.

My present effort, which is being pursued with more interest than time or material, may serve as a trial balloon in a social atmosphere which, it seems to me, is already considerably modified in many respects. It seems entirely possible that in the not too distant future a human being affected with neuroepithelial granulomatosis may exist without the handicaps to which he has been subjected in the past, so that the physician can aid effectively in relieving him of most of the physical disturbances due to the infection to which he is the host.

The results obtained at the Sta. Isabel de Hungría clinic can be summarized as follows: The patient who is really interested in his health and free from social problems, and who needs and is desirous for work, is the one who derives most benefit from treatment. In most cases of that kind it brings about progressive regression of the symptoms, accompanied in some cases by decrease of the bacillus count if not entire negativity, although that is rare.

The treatment undoubtedly seems to influence the frequency and severity of the reactional phenomena, the control of which is very difficult since the various medications used for it (antimony compounds, antihistaminics, cortisone) soon lose their efficacy. There is still a great need for a treatment with effect at least comparable to that of the sulfones for those who are intolerant to that type of drugs.

On the whole much has been achieved, and, although accomplishments are below expectations, if we recall the individual and collective pictures of ten years ago we but can feel optimistic.

Bogotá, Colombia

DARIO MALDONADO, M.D.