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EDITORIALS

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LEPROSY TREATMENT IN RUSSIA

It has been a long time since there has appeared in *THE JOURNAL* any definite information about leprosy or leprosy work in the U.S.S.R. Before the last World War we carried an occasional article from Russia, and shortly after the end of the war there was received a solicitous message from one of the Russian workers, but in the years since then no more material from there has been received for publication.

There was one break in the silence two or three years ago when Professor Torsuev, of Rostov-on-Don, sent out a batch of his own publications. However, they were all in the Russian language and without even titles in another language, so they were not "available" for notice in *THE JOURNAL*.

In the twelve volumes of *THE JOURNAL* which have appeared since quarterly publication was resumed in 1947, there are only 4 brief abstracts of Russian articles, all of them copied from *Excerpta Medica*. In our file of references to the leprosy literature of this period there are 31 cards pertaining to articles published in Russia, not counting a few on rat leprosy. A full half of those references are simple titles, no abstracts having been found in periodicals received. Several of the abstracts were too uninformative to be worth copying; 7 of them, found relatively recently, are used in this issue.

During these years, however, a new generation of leprologists has developed in Russia. Outstanding among them, apparently, are Drs.

N. M. Baluev and K. Kolesov, for they are now members of the WHO Expert Advisory Panel on Leprosy. However, their names are not found in our reference file, which indicates how unrepresentative is the information available to us.

In these circumstances we are particularly pleased to present in this issue, thanks to the initiative of J. Ross Innes, a translation of a sort of review article on leprosy therapy in Russia published in 1957 by S. F. Shubin, director of the Leprosy Research Institute. It supplies some information about other features of activities in Russia, although it is a strange report in certain respects. Especially conspicuous is the complete absence of statistics regarding the numbers of cases dealt with. There are given only percentages of them which have or have had this or that kind of lesion, or which have improved under one treatment or another, or have improved sufficiently to be discharged from leprosaria to outpatient treatment. With one exception it does not mention the actual location of the institutions mentioned—not even the one from which it emanated.

Sulfones, the use of which is said to have begun in 1951, are regarded—with special mention of DDS and Sulphetrone—as constituting the most effective remedy, although not entirely satisfactory. There is also a boost for the thiosemicarbazones, specifically Tibione, as an active remedy.¹

The list of other medicaments which have been tried out, or used as auxiliary treatment or for some special phase of the disease, is a long one. Some of them seem odd, such as Filatov's biostimulants (grafting of vegetable and animal tissue, and injection of extracts), and Bogomolts' antireticular cytotoxic serum. Special mention of Gubaren's preparations of oxydiphtherine acids arouses curiosity as to their nature. Various other remedies referred to will not be recognized, including the "leprol with 'tissulin'" ascribed to Zholkevich.

Of interest is the indication that experiments are being carried out with clinically cured patients who are persistently lepromin negative, to raise the resistance by means of vaccination. At Rostov the Stefan-sky vaccine has been used to achieve transformation to lepromin positivity—which, it is added, "promotes clinical recovery."

Nothing is to be learned of the extent of the leprosy problem in the U.S.S.R., or of any general measures of control that are being employed. However, it is evident that much more attention is now being paid the disease than in the past. Besides the Institute for the Study of Leprosy, there is a Rostov Clinical Experimental Leprosarium, in existence for eight years at the time the report was written. The indication that the Central Committee of the Medical Institute has a leprology section is not particularly informative. As for the number of

¹ This is in line with the report of A. M. Alonso which also is in this issue.

leprosaria in the U.S.S.R., it can only be said that—including the Leprosy Institute—fourteen are mentioned by name. A Zagar clinic is repeatedly mentioned, but no other one, suggesting that it may be unique in some respects. That there may perhaps be preventoria in Russia is suggested by the mention of a “prophylactorium” in Astrakhan.

The bases of admission to and discharge from the leprosaria are not apparent. It is stated that of the patients of the Leprosy Institute who had been discharged to outpatient treatment, 91 per cent had tuberculoid leprosy, 8 per cent lepromatous, and 1 per cent indeterminate. If the tuberculoid and indeterminate cases which had been admitted were run-of-the-mill cases of those categories as seen elsewhere, it would follow that bacteriologic positivity is not a prerequisite for admission.

It is to be hoped that, in the not-too-distant future, more information on these and other features of leprosy and leprosy work in Russia may be made available.—H. W. W.