

COST OF DRUGS. SURVEY METHODS

To the EDITOR:

In this hospital, with 400 patients at the end of 1933, various remedies have been tried during the past five years. It has been concluded that *H. wightiana* ethyl esters give by far the best results and they are now being used exclusively, the iodized preparation being much preferred to the plain. The results obtained with them are far better than any others I have seen in 25 years of active experience.

We are up against the difficulty that the iodized esters are so expensive that I cannot possibly afford to continue to treat all the

patients with them. Can you tell me how much it costs to make them at Culion? Our supply is obtained from (1) a commercial source abroad, and (2) the government chemical laboratory of a neighboring country; no great difference in effectiveness has been found between them. The latter charges us £3 per liter, while the former has asked £3.10.0 per liter supplied from their headquarters. Why is it so costly? The ingredients individually do not appear to be very expensive. I could use here anything up to 300 liters per annum, but cannot possibly afford to do so at such prices. Could the drug be shipped in bulk? Does it keep well for, say, a year?

I have advised the Government here that much more attention should be paid to examination of contacts, discharged patients, and infants born here and sent home, rather than to continue with surveys of whole districts. Surveys show up advanced cases, but I am sure that we miss the early cases, for there is not time during a survey for a close examination. I would much like an opinion on this.

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[*Comment.*—The question of the cost of antileprosy drugs arises frequently. When chaulmoogra ethyl esters were first put on the market as a proprietary product, a score of years and more ago, the price was so prohibitive that the adoption of this form of the drug was delayed many years. At the present time the commercial manufacturers—because of lack of competition, one suspects—still seem inclined to price these important basic drugs in a way more appropriate for small-scale laboratory curiosities or elegant pharmaceutical specialties. Urgent appeals having been made to the Philippine Government to do so, it has arranged to send the ethyl esters to institutions abroad, as stated in a recent issue of the *JOURNAL* (Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 115). The prices set are much above the actual cost of manufacture on the scale that this is done at Culion, even taking salaries and other overhead into account, but one is informed that the authorities believed it undesirable to set a lower price than would bring a profitable return to a manufacturer making the drug on a production basis. It is also to be noted that in India some of the institutions make their own esters on a small scale, by a relatively simple method that seems to be practicable provided a proper grade of oil can be obtained. The technic, which is not difficult, is given in the report of the Leonard Wood Memorial Conference on Leprosy, reprinted in this issue of the *JOURNAL*.

As for leprosy surveys, there probably will be general agreement from the informed that large-scale inquiries as ordinarily carried

out do tend to miss a greater or less proportion of cases. Naturally, the amount of this will vary greatly with conditions, especially with the degree of cooperation on the part of the people and their intelligence, but superficial examinations unavoidably tend to miss many of the slighter lesions. Further, it is only reasonable to expect that there will be a higher proportion of cases in the part of the population not seen at all than in that examined. Special interest attaches to the intensive survey made in 1933 at Cordova, Cebu, under the auspices of the Leonard Wood Memorial and the Philippine Bureau of Health, the report of which has yet to appear. Virtually the entire population of a municipality of more than 6,000 people was examined closely, but the cost of so intensive an inquiry is prohibitive for large-scale work.

It seems imperative that a practical basis of leprosy control work should be reached whereby effective results can be gotten within practicable limits of cost. For the present, however, advocates of various systems have mostly expectation to go on. It is greatly to be desired that the system here suggested may be given a fair and thorough trial over a period of years in some country where it would be practicable.
