

## World-wide Leprosy Survey for Progress in Leprosy Control

TO THE EDITOR:

When we completed the isolation of leprosy patients that we knew about in the Philippines in 1912 and quartered them in the Island of Culion, where a separate town of 10,000 inmates was constructed to receive them, we fondly believed that after this was done we could expect a rapid decline in the incidence of leprosy. Apparently this has not happened. A few recent checks seem to indicate that the incidence of the disease has not lessened and there

is even a possibility that it may have increased. Since then millions have been spent in laboratory research with the hope of creating new knowledge that would enable better control of leprosy. Unfortunately, so far as I know, very little progress has been made with all this research work. The data that have been developed are nearly all negative. On the other hand, in the field—that is in the hospitals and clinics—better drugs have been developed, which undoubtedly have greatly improved

the treatment of the disease and many arrested cases have resulted and some cured. Information from other countries also indicates it may possibly be that the incidence of leprosy has increased. On the other hand, there is authenticated information that the incidence of the disease has decreased in some countries. This apparently has occurred in Hawaii.

As it seems that little or no progress has been made in the control of the disease, and it is even possible that the incidence is increasing, it seems to me that another approach should be developed. The statistics of leprosy are so fragmentary and unreliable that it is impossible to assess reliably just how many cases there are in each country. Perhaps, then, the first step should be to make a world survey, country by country, which would show, among other things, the incidence and the number under treatment.

In dealing with other diseases it has often happened that an epidemiologic survey has pointed out the road to control. In any case, a base line would be established from which the results of future efforts to control could be measured. The questionnaire for the survey should be prepared by trained statisticians. If this idea should meet with favor, it would seem well to approach the World Health Organization to ascertain if they would undertake the task. Leprosy is a serious problem in which our health efforts have made very little progress and deserves a better effort to bring this most refractory of diseases under control.

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