
A VILLAGE CLINIC FOR LEPROSY TREATMENT

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Kwangtung has long been recognized as one of the provinces of China most heavily infected with leprosy. What is known of the situation in the region around Swatow, in which there is an estimated population of 2,000,000 people, can be stated briefly.

Just over 1,000 cases have been diagnosed clinically at the Swatow Mission Hospital within the last six years, and about 100 cases attend our weekly outpatient leprosy clinic for treatment. Up-country mission hospitals report seeing numerous cases, and one of them maintains a leprosy clinic with nearly 100 cases in attendance. There are about 100 cases continually in segregation in a leper colony maintained by the Swatow Municipality. From the information available I think it is safe to assume that at least 10,000 persons are suffering from the disease in this district, or about five per thousand.

The only official activity at present is the maintenance of the municipal colony referred to, a small institution on an island, built some thirteen years ago with a capacity of 60 patients but housing twice as many. Few other than pauper lepers found begging in the streets are sent there. Recently the provincial government has taken an interest in the matter and an organization has been formed with the purpose of enlarging the colony to a capacity of 500, the provincial government offering a grant of \$2,000 (Mex.) per month for operation. However, the circumstances are such that even this expansion of activity seems far from imminent.

With a view to making it easier for patients to get treatment, and in order to treat the condition at its source in the villages, the writer decided last year to experiment with the organization of a village clinic. The original aim was (a) to form in the village an organization which should accept responsibility for all local arrangements and local expenses, and (b) to secure the voluntary services of doctors practicing in the neighborhood. The cost of the drugs used was covered by a grant from the Mission to Lepers.

The idea was discussed with a Chinese minister who is in touch with the work of all the up-country churches and he suggested that his own village, Iam Tsau, would be good place to start in. He personally knew of a number of lepers there, and Iam Tsau has the oldest and strongest of the up-country churches, a number of doctors being among its strongest supporters. The village has about 6,000 inhabitants, and is situated some twenty-five miles from Swatow. The place is reached by motor-bus—or to be accurate by five buses, as the road crosses the delta of the Han river and is cut in four places by its branches—and the journey takes from two to three-and-a-half hours each way according to the weather and one's luck in making connections.

After correspondence with the local minister, who arranged to notify the lepers known to him of our coming and for the use of a temple on the outskirts of the village for the meeting, our first visit was made on September 23rd,

1934. On this occasion 26 patients put in an appearance. It was arranged to hold weekly clinics, and a committee was formed which would take over the local responsibilities and expenses and would work in coöperation with the members of the hospital staff engaged in leprosy work. By the end of the year the number registered had reached 106, and by far the greater number were putting in regular attendance. The news of the clinic had spread rapidly to the surrounding villages and patients were coming distances of ten and twenty miles to get the treatment.

For the first two clinics two members of our hospital staff went to Iam Tsau, and the technic of the injections was shown to a local practitioner—a non-graduate but the only “western doctor” in the village. He carried on the work for several weeks, and the hospital arranged for someone to go over once a month to supervise and assist. However, the rapid increase in the numbers attending the clinic made it impossible for the local practitioner to carry on single-handed. Therefore two doctors, members of the Iam Tsau church who are in practice in towns some five miles distant, were invited to help with the work twice a month. This they did, but the demands of their practice and the time involved in getting to Iam Tsau and attending to 50 or 60 lepers made their visits uncertain. The further steady increase in the number of patients made it imperative that regular assistance should be sent, and so the hospital is now sending over a member of its staff each week. This work is undertaken by Dr. Ang Tsak Liang who has been in charge of our leper clinic for some years, and by a senior technician who assists in the leper clinic, and by myself.

The treatment given has consisted of intramuscular injections of iodized esters (from Culion) and alepol 4 per cent (B. W. and Co.), and intradermal injections of the iodized esters. All treatment is given free, but since such large numbers of patients have come forward they have been asked to contribute what they can towards the cost of their treatment. It is gratifying to know that within a few weeks over \$50 (Mex.) was received from this source.

The clinic was originally held in a small temple on the outskirts of the village. Later a mat-shed was erected just outside the temple doors and was used for the injections, the patients waiting in the temple itself. With the present large number of patients coming up the villagers are beginning to criticize the use of the temple for this purpose, and plans are now afoot to put up a shelter on some common land outside the village.

The clinic has been running for less than four months, and though simple records are being kept no time has yet been found to draw up a detailed report of the types of cases seen, nor of course can the results of treatment be reported on as yet. However, many patients already claim to be much improved, and in a number of cases this is obvious. We hope soon to establish other, similar clinics in nearby towns.