

## The Probably Improbable Index (PI<sub>2</sub>)

Some two decades ago, as we were about to return to the Orient after obtaining a "superb modern education," a mission secretary exhorted us to "write, write, write, when you arrive, for it is our experience that after about three years our senneds tend to stop writing."

Years have passed, years that now include just three years' involvement with these editorial pages, and the fear is upon us that we may cease to write (though we are aware that readers may not harbor a similar fear) and that contributive immortality may pass us by. Casting about for an immortal vehicle we have been struck by the potentialities of constructing an "Index," and leprology having been a fertile breeding ground for indices provides good models for their development. Thus, there is the Bacillary Index, the Morphologic Index, the Histologic (Biopsy) Index, the Granularity Index, Type Index, the Necropsy Index, and lepromin indices, to mention a few; all with variations. At the present rate of elimination of leprosy from the world, the authors of these indices bid fair to remain immortal. It is, of course, also possible for indices to be modified, refined or expanded, providing additional slots of fame. This has not escaped attention, and

modifications and refinements there have been, as well as controversies.

Based on experience with theses from medical students and graduate students, and on a considerable volume of manuscripts submitted to this JOURNAL it has struck us that a probability index may be useful for grading ideas, hypotheses, theories and prophesies. We, therefore, propose the following:

1+	possibly possible	10 <sup>1</sup>	Logarithmic Probability
2+	probably possible	10 <sup>2</sup>	
3+	possible	10 <sup>3</sup>	
4+	possibly probable	10 <sup>4</sup>	
5+	probably probable	10 <sup>5</sup>	
6+	probable	10 <sup>6</sup>	

We suggest the designation "Probably Improbable Index" (PII) because it lends itself to a neat scientific-appearing abbreviation, namely PI<sub>2</sub>, which is unlikely to be confused with any chemical designation since it is improbable that any chemical compound of this designation is probable, even in these days of chemical wizardry. Also, it is a "first" in leprology—an index with a double element!

We admit that the index will not cover all instances for we have seen rare offerings

which we would be tempted to rate as  $PI_2 = 10^{-6}$  but they are so rare as to be counted on one finger and may be regarded as being really outside the field of leprology and analogous to the article we recently encountered entitled, "Flying Saucers Own Earth and All Mankind," i.e. in the area of scientific delusion. We therefore reserve the negative logs for judging areas in which we do not pretend expertise. We could, also, of course, extend the permutations to additional logs, but have decided to retain the present '6+' as a maximum since we are not yet positive of the probability of positivity in biology and because we wish to acknowledge an indiceal affiliation with, and debt to, that excellent source of indices—the leprosy problem.

The log scale is not to be regarded as absolute, but it does, as indices must, bridge the gap between uncertainty and certainty, and has a nice scientific touch. That which was but an editorial opinion may now become a breakthrough for more precise computerized evaluation of ideas. This should lead to a logarithmic increase in the progress of knowledge accumulation

and we confidently predict (and thus expect probability study funding) that *M. leprae* will as a result be cultivated profusely ( $PI_2 = 6+$  based on hope), an effective vaccine prepared ( $PI_2 = 1+$ , based on judgement), and leprosy thereby rapidly eliminated ( $PI_2 = 2+$ , based on wishful thinking).

A word of caution is in order. It is quite possible, of course, that time may show the wisdom of altering the  $PI_2$  designation of an idea, or even of a scientific prophecy. Thus, the reported prediction by Armauer Hansen in about 1865, to the effect that leprosy would be eliminated from Norway by 1920 would perhaps have rated a  $PI_2$  designation of 1+ in 1865, but be worth a 6+ in 1920. However, there is comfort in the realization that present literature is regarded as ancient after about a decade and is often forgotten by new generations who kindly do not resurrect the past for they are unaware of it.

Finally, in the hope of portraying the modesty that the expectation of immortality should engender, we sign this effort:

—Anonymously Anonymous