

## *M. leprae* Does Not Oxidize DOPA

TO THE EDITOR:

The claim that DOPA oxidation is a unique property of *M. leprae* has been widely accepted without further critical investigations of the phenolase activity of host grown *M. leprae*. The test has been erroneously used for the identification of human leprosy bacilli, until Skinsnes *et al* (IJL 43 [1975] 193-209) and Kato *et al* (IJL 44 [1975] 435-442) have shown that identification of *M. leprae* is not related to phenolase activity. These investigations included all necessary controls, analysis of the observations were done by qualified investigators, and results are so undisputable that any further debate would just be repetitive.

Since DOPA is one of the most unstable compounds in nature, its chemical or auto-oxidation might be induced by just anything. It has been stated several times by Prabhakaran that DOPA is an unstable compound

and is easily auto-oxidized. Any substance which is quite unstable and undergoes rapid auto-oxidation has never been used as a substrate for microorganisms, whereas DOPA has been claimed by Prabhakaran to be the only substrate, so far discovered, for *M. leprae*. There is no evidence whatsoever that *M. leprae* utilizes DOPA oxidation to produce energy for growth or multiplication.

The closing sentences of Prabhakaran's Letter to the Editor are quite unusual language on the pages of the JOURNAL and regrettable in academic debates. We therefore do not wish to comment on this and we consider the DOPA debate as closed.

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