Thyroxine and Leprosy

TO THE EDITOR:

My interest in the possible harmful effect of giving thyroxine or dried thyroid tablets to leprosy patients dates from the 1950s when I saw an adult Eurasian female with active lepromatous leprosy who gave a history of having consulted her family doctor a few months previously because of edema of legs, thickening of the skin of the face and limbs, thinning of eyebrows, and a hoarse voice. She was treated with dried thyroid tablets on the assumption that her symptoms were due to myxedema, and when she reported for follow-up examination, her doctor was surprised to see papules and nodules on her skin and promptly referred her for a second opinion.

I recall reading, about that time, a report of clinical manifestations of lepromatous leprosy appearing in an obese female patient who was being treated with dried thyroid tablets in the hope of reducing her weight, but I am unable to trace the reference. Can any reader supply me with it or with any other references on this subject? It is probable that any condition associated with a sustained increase in the level of circulating thyroxine can have a deleterious effect on leprosy, and I have postulated that one of the factors responsible for downgrading of leprosy during pregnancy is the progressive rise in serum thyroxine (T4) to twice the normal figure by the 3rd trimester ([2]). It has been reported that the addition of thyroxine sodium to a culture medium produces a metabolic stimulating action on *M. leprae* ([1]), and I would be interested to hear if anyone has observed the effect of raising the level of circulating thyroxine in laboratory animals infected with *M. leprae*.

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REFERENCES

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2. JOPLING, W. H. *Handbook of Leprosy*. 2nd ed. London: William Heinemann Medical Books, 1978, p. 93.