

CORRESPONDENCE

This department is for the publication of informal communications that are of interest because they are informative and stimulating, and for the discussion of controversial matters. The mandate of this JOURNAL is to disseminate information relating to leprosy in particular and also other mycobacterial diseases. Dissident comment or interpretation on published research is of course valid, but personality attacks on individuals would seem unnecessary. Political comments, valid or not, also are unwelcome. They might result in interference with the distribution of the JOURNAL and thus interfere with its prime purpose.

Leprosy Eradication in the Developing Countries:
The Required Necessary Foundation

TO THE EDITOR:

Health for all by the year 2000 is the new slogan, and really in 19 years a lot can be done by concerted effort to put mankind on the right orbit to achieving a greater degree of resistance to many diseases.

Research in leprosy has not yielded as much dividend as had been expected, and this is because the leprosy bacillus is a most complex organism to deal with. A recent revelation by Dr. R. J. W. Rees at the last seminar hosted by the Armauer Hansen Research Institute at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, (27–30 October 1980) that he and Dr. Convit independently have observed two growth curves for *Mycobacterium leprae*, suggesting two strains of *M. leprae*, went to dampen our hopes the more. Nevertheless, it underscores the degree of complexity the leprosy bacillus can display, and therefore the amount of concerted, constructive effort needed before achieving a definite goal.

But there are two major problems we in the developing countries have, and which many investigators have, for a long time, underestimated; these are nutrition and tolerably good living conditions. We all know

that an undernourished individual is immunologically incompetent in warding off infections. It is the poor, less privileged ones in the community, particularly those living in slum areas with poorly ventilated houses, who are most susceptible to leprosy infection.

A lot of energy has been expended in the explorative activities of vaccine production in leprosy, and maybe we shall have great expectation! However, since the developing countries harbor nearly all the world's reservoir of leprosy bacilli, what the developed and developing countries should concentrate on now, at least for the next 19 years, is improvement in the nutrition and accommodations of the poor communities of leprosy stricken areas of the world.

If this is done, then the vaccine production would have a fertile soil, and the overall resistance to diseases in 2000, at least in the developing countries, would be more encouraging.

—S. N. C. Wemambu, M.D.,
Dip. Bact., F. M. C. Path.

*College of Medicine
Department of Microbiology
Benin City, Nigeria*