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 Vaccines from Cultivable Mycobacteria

TO THE EDITOR:

Using a vaccine containing *Mycobacterium w,* Mukherjee, *et al.* [4] have basically obtained, albeit on a larger sample, results similar to those reported earlier by us with ICRC vaccine [1, 2]. Both of the vaccines, which are prepared from cultivable mycobacteria, induce lepromin conversion in a majority of lepromatous leprosy patients, associated with upgrading of tissue reaction and accelerated bacillary clearance. Some patients even show reversal reaction [1, 4]. A comparative account of the two mycobacteria makes interesting reading (The Table).

Cultural characteristics, similarity of protein antigens and, especially, identical RFLP patterns indicate that the two organisms, ICRC and *Mycobacterium w,* may not be very much different, explaining the similarity of the observations. The results from two independent laboratories further show that vaccines containing cultivable mycobacteria, exhibiting crossreactivity with *M. leprae,* could be effective immunotherapeutic agents [2, 4].

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THE TABLE. *Comparative features of ICRC and* Mycobacterium w.

	ICRC	*Mycobacterium w*
Year of isolation	1958	1978
Source	LL patients	Somewhat uncertain
Taxonomical position[8]	*M. avium-intracellulare* complex[a]	*M. avium-intracellulare* complex[a]
Growth characteristics	Easily grows on microbiological media	Easily grows on microbiological media
Temp. optima[a]	35°C	35°C
Antigenic relatedness		
B-cell antigen (using rabbit antibodies)	Similar for the two organisms[b]	
T-cell (LTT as well as skin reaction)	Very similar for the two organisms [5, 6, 7]	
DNA		
Homology with *M. leprae*	Identical for the two organisms [3]	
RFLPs with PstI, and BstEII and probes		
M. leprae 3.6-kb EcoRI fragment	RFLPs with both enzymes and probes identical for ICRC and *Mycobacterium w* [3]	
M. tuberculosis 65-kDa antigen gene		

[a] Personal communication, C. Shepard, 1983.
[b] Personal communication, J. L. Stanford, 1979.

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