Editor’s Choice

We are pleased to present this special issue of *Leprosy Review* on operational research, featuring seven original papers and one short report. As can be expected with a topic like operational research, the papers cover a wide range of topics. Brandsma *et al.* describe the transition of Green Pastures Hospital in Pokhara, Nepal, from a typical leprosy hospital to a full-fledged multi-disability rehabilitation centre. This process, sometimes referred to as ‘reverse integration’ makes good use of knowledge and skill acquired in the treatment and rehabilitation of people affected by leprosy to address a major, often unmet need in leprosy-endemic countries: the rehabilitation of people, particularly adults, with other disability.

Two papers deal with leprosy-related stigma and the resulting problems in social participation. Cross and Chouwdhary describe the success of the Stigma Elimination Project in south Nepal, which used a participative empowerment approach to help people affected by leprosy become change agents in their community. The impact was demonstrated using the Participation Scale, a new instrument to measure social participation. Nicholls *et al.* report another study carried out in India and Brazil using this scale to examine risk factors for participation restriction in preparation for developing a screening tool for to identify people at risk of such problems. They identified four risk factors as the basis for a simple generic screening tool to identify individuals at risk of participation restrictions. These factors – the physical impact of leprosy, an emotional response to the diagnosis, female gender and having little or no education – were relevant for both countries.

Socio-economic problems are also a key aspect in the paper by Shumin Chen *et al.* They describe the difficulties faced by people living in small leprosaria in China and the difficult dilemmas that need to be faced in planning future care for this dwindling, increasingly elderly group of people with severe disability.

Three contributions address different aspects of leprosy control. Wijesinghe and Settinayake report how integration of leprosy control into the general health services in Sri Lanka gradually lead to an increasing proportion of new cases reporting to larger hospitals, particularly those offering specialist dermatological services. Thailand has had an integrated leprosy control programme for many years and the national programme is concerned with maintaining and upgrading quality in the face of low endemicity. Kampirapap *et al.* describe how they used a ‘client perspective’ study to investigate perceived quality of care and to determine what aspects should have priority in improving services further. Arif discusses some of the challenges of a leprosy-related health information system in an integrated programme. Former vertical programmes such as the one in India had elaborate systems, often maintained meticulously by dedicated programme staff. As leprosy programmes in India were integrated in the general health services, a simplified information system (SIS) for leprosy was designed and implemented. This SIS has been rolled out in this vast programme at a commendable rate, due to strong government commitment combined with dedicated NGO support.
The INFIR Cohort Study team presents a detailed analysis of the neurological features of leprosy at the intake of the cohort. The study was designed to look for tools to aid prediction and early detection of reactions and nerve function impairment (NFI) in leprosy. The present paper validates the use of graded nylon monofilaments (MF) and voluntary muscle testing (VMT) to monitor changes over time in peripheral nerve function. At the same time, sensory nerve conduction and warm detection threshold testing highlight that NFI detected with ‘field tools’ like the MF and VMT only reveal the tip of an iceberg of neuropathy in many (MB) patients.

The range of topics included in this last issue of 2005 should ensure that all readers will find something to arouse their interest.

Wim van Brakel
Guest Editor