This issue of *Leprosy Review* has a mix of interesting and diverse papers and reviews. Dick Truman and Paul Fine (pp. 89–95) have written a thoughtful review on non-human sources of *M. leprae*. They emphasise that *M. leprae* has never been found to replicate in the environment, so the discovery of non-human sources might be important in defining disease transmission. However it is vital that any identifications of *M. leprae* in non-human sources or the environment are of high scientific quality. They therefore propose that any report of finding *M. leprae* in non-human sources should include information on the following aspects of the investigation and that these should be criteria by which reports should be measured. Firstly, that infection with *M. leprae* should have been established using a full range of diagnostic tests which would include histopathological assessment of biopsies showing that there was evidence of either *M. leprae* infection or a tissue response to the organism. If that is not possible then evidence of *M. leprae* infection may be deduced if there is a serological response to *M. leprae* antigens such as PGL-1 antibodies should be used as a second line investigation. When PCR is used to detect *M. leprae* DNA this should only be acceptable when primers that amplify multiple segments of the chromosome have been used and the resulting amplicons sequenced. Appropriate positive and negative controls should be included and findings should be verified in an independent laboratory. Case control studies looking at armadillo contact should also include information about important confounders such as urban and rural exposure, age, sex and BCG vaccination status. These are important criteria, and I hope that this proposal will stimulate discussion and adoption of these criteria. We will visit this issue in a future issue of *Leprosy Review* after readers have responded.

Continuing with the molecular biology theme, we have a notice from Barry Hall (pp. 96–98) explaining the opening of an *M. leprae* VNTR data base that will be hosted at The Bellingham Research Institute, Washington State, USA. This is a very important endeavour. Strain typing of *M. leprae* can be done using two techniques, either single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) analysis or variable tandem nucleotide repeat (VNTR) sequence analysis, in which different parts of the genome are analysed. The drawback with SNP analysis is that only a limited range of variation has been found. Looking at VNTRs has however found too much variation and it is difficult to analyse the data and establish meaningful relationships between strains. Barry Hall has developed new way of analysing the data including the Nearest Neighbour technique. We hope that people will send their strains to the data bank so that maximal use can be made of the various efforts that are going on around the leprosy world to type *M. leprae*.

There are also several papers looking at social aspects of leprosy. Here it is also important that standardised tools should be used so that findings can be compared between different countries and settings. Two papers have used the newly developed P scale to assess participation levels by patients. Ebenso (pp. 99–110) found that income generation was a key factor in improving self esteem and has suggested that micro-credit schemes should be assessed as a potential stigma reduction aid. Boku et al. (pp. 111–120) found that lack of visible deformity was important in The Philippines in reducing stigma and this gives another opportunity for stigma reduction. This finding highlights the importance of prevention of disability programmes, and Hugh Cross (pp. 138–143) reports on a global survey of POD activities in leprosy endemic countries. The picture is not encouraging; the programmes that did
report indicated that there were multiple problems especially with health worker capacity and often
POD was given a very low priority.

This interesting collection of studies illustrates the diverse problems that continue to challenge
treatment workers.

We shall be having a Special issue on Stigma in June 2011 so start looking for your articles and
work for this issue. This will give us an opportunity to explore these issues in depth.

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