Editor’s Choice

The first edition of the journal for 2003 includes two Editorials, one Review, seven Original Articles and five Letters to the Editor, covering a remarkable range of subject matter. Those who have been associated with LEPROZA and this journal over the years may recall that, as recently as the 1970s, it was occasionally necessary for the Editor to report that nothing of sufficient interest or importance had been submitted to the journal to justify the production of the next edition. Great credit for this transformation should go to our Editor, Diana Lockwood, currently on sabbatical until July this year.

The Editorial on uniform multidrug therapy (UMDT) by Ji and Saunderson reviews the concept in detail and concludes that it is wishful thinking to ignore the fact that requirements for chemotherapy are different among various subgroups of patients and to recommend a uniform regimen for all patients. They add that substantial modifications are needed to address flaws in the research protocol if the trial is to reach a clear-cut conclusion, whilst also avoiding the possibility that multidrugable (MB) patients, particularly those with a high initial bacteriological index (BI), may be under-treated. The second Editorial, by Cairns Smith, brings together views on the International Leprosy Congress in 2002 in Brazil from SK Nordeen on epidemiology and leprosy control; Norma Foss on clinical leprosy and therapeutics; Warwick Britton on the quiet revolution in basic research; WCS Smith on prevention of disability, social aspects and rehabilitation. The final paragraph could perhaps be taken as a kind of beacon for our aspirations in the year 2003: ‘... That is why social science is now so important—the strengths we need to make programmes sustainable lie in the people and their communities and not with medical experts and external donors. It is important that this approach, which is now gathering momentum, is maintained.’

Douglas Young, of Imperial College, London, reviews the prospects for molecular epidemiology of leprosy, summarizing the important scientific challenges that remain, but concluding that the most informative research (as in tuberculosis) will be generated by collaboration between molecular biologist and epidemiologist to ensure that efforts are invested in samples that have well-defined clinical and epidemiological provenance.

The authors of the seven original articles come from Spain, India, Bangladesh, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, Ethiopia, Turkey, Congo and Nigeria. Their wide range reflects the tradition of this journal to endeavour to include subject matter of relevance to leprosy workers at all levels.

Finally, I hope readers will join us in congratulating Dr Yo Yuasa on the 2002 Damien-Dutton Award (p. 95). His acceptance speech, summarized in this issue, emphasized his belief that ‘. . . the problems of leprosy are no longer medical ones nowadays, as most of you realise, but are primarily due to social ones, by which I mean extremely negative human reactions to what M. leprae does to some people affected by leprosy.’

A. COLIN MCDougall
(Deputy Editor)