

Book Review

Leprosy: Science Towards Dignity

Edited by Makino et al.

Tokai University Press 2011

Everything about leprosy is a tale that not only spans the length and breadth of countries and continents but also the depths of the human heart where the more you venture the more lost you get. The social aspects and stigma of leprosy and personal aspects of leprosy have been covered in publications by individuals and human rights organisations. However, there are not many technical books on leprosy especially after the significant decline in the number of leprosy cases and a declining interest in the subject.

The book by Makino *et al.* (Tokai University Press, 2011) is a welcome addition.

The book is interesting because it has been given a title with a difference ‘Leprosy: science towards dignity’ emphasising that the basic purpose of leprosy research is to reduce the suffering and its sequelae, physical, psychological and social, associated with leprosy.

The book covers almost everything related to the disease. The strongest sections are the chapters on history of leprosy, the epidemiology, disease classification, therapy, calendar of international conferences and workshops on leprosy, prevention and management of disabilities and social aspects. Some chapters especially on molecular biology, microbiology, experimental leprosy, biochemistry, immunology, immunogenetics and serology give all the exhaustive details and are very well written.

The component on clinical aspects including pathology, clinical manifestations, diagnosis, chemotherapy, reactions, ocular leprosy and orthoses are adequate. The chapters on otorhinolaryngological findings and oral lesions are either inadequate and at many places confusing. But happily for some specific details terms like torus tubarius, choana etc. have been added, gently reminding us of the terms we had almost forgotten and which do not appear in the present text books.

The chapter on oral care, oral hygiene and oral health is too elaborate and will interest the dental surgeon more.

Even with all these imbalances in the chapters this book is very comprehensive.

The serious problem lies with the language which starts from page one and also the translation of technical words, many of which are old or inappropriate. The translator has done a good job in spite of lexical and syntactic lapses. Considering the good intentions of the authors and the publishers to bring out an up to date book on leprosy I would have had no hesitation in recommending this as a text book – but considering the language – which can create confusion in the mind of the fresh reader – this book is good only for the hard core leprologist who can sift the intended knowledge from the maze of confusing terminologies and the language which is incomprehensible in places.

There are certain comments/statements/observations made in different chapters which are difficult to understand, not supported by published evidence and also confusing. Some of the prominent ones are:

“Furthermore understanding the concept and clinical symptoms of type 1 and type 2 reactions is very important for the classification of leprosy. (p. 128)”

“The subclinical state is leprosy may be comparable to the ‘Ghon focus’ in tuberculosis. (p. 132)”

“The incidence of ENL rises to 64% when MDT is added after the use of a different antibacterial agent, yet is low (16%) with MDT only. (p. 157)”

“The only leprosy reactions observed in the BT type is BR. So, even if a patient with BT type displays a down grading reaction it should be considered an exacerbation of the disease and differentiated from a reaction. (p. 158)”

“They (steroids) are used in order to cure nervous disorders. (p. 160)”

“Meanwhile even if the reaction is generally controlled the ophthalmological changes are difficult to ascertain. Prudence is required because inflammation may leave a residual horny coat or iris. (p. 161)”

“In case where BR or ENL is diagnosed during edema, the edema is considered the respective BR or ENL reaction. (p. 166)”

“Clofazimine administered to BR high risk patients in Borderline group 12 weeks before initiation of MDT treatment displays significant prevention of neuritis or BR onset as well as nerve damage. (p. 168)”

There is some more confusion about the terminology borderline (type 1) reaction, borderline (BR) reaction. It would have been better if words like ‘testitis,’ ‘osteomieritis’ and ‘calli’ had been substituted with more often used understandable English equivalents. There is also some confusion about the terminology and dates of the international leprosy conferences.

In the table on classification of leprosy ‘Border’ of the lesion and “irregular extension of the border/edge of the lesion” or slightly away from the lesion i.e. pseudopodia” and satellite lesions should have been mentioned i.e. “breaking of the regular border.”

Comparison of leprosy with certain viral infections is confusing and out of place. The quality of the photographs is good – but they are too small to appreciate the exact morphology of the lesions.

There is much avoidable repetition in the chapters and even in the same chapter. Many other good references are not included.

The chapter on absolute quarantine policy in Japan is revealing.

The last chapter ‘What more we should do for leprosy’ by Yo Yuasa is a masterpiece. He being involved in all aspects of leprosy is the right person to say all what he has said about the future of leprosy and leprosy related programmes and most importantly the attitude of the society and how the mind-set has evolved. Only Yo Yuasa has the ability to mix mundane with the mysterious in the right proportions.

Apart from highlighting the success part, narrative by the author is peppered with quaint observations and has also very lucidly brought out the pain and struggle experienced by the leprosy patients. However the efforts and contribution of the NGOs have been fully acknowledged which is/was not only inspiring for the patients but also for those who served these unfortunates to glory.

Overall the book with all its deficiencies is a great source of information and knowledge and the application of science for the welfare of those cursed, for whom the description “physical corruption of the body of the ‘leper’ became the moral corruption of the soul” is very apt.

This particular chapter and the book is a tribute to the compassion and genius of all the Japanese people who supported the cause of leprosy – with funding and care all over the world for so many years and still continue to do that.

All known and established leprosy centres in the world must have a copy of this book for reference.

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