Indian J Med Res 123, March 2006, pp 477-478

Book Review

Trends and research in Leishmaniasis, with particular reference to kala azar. Report of the 5th Sir Dorabji Tata Symposium. Raghunath D, Nayak R, editors (Tata McGraw-Hill, New Delhi) 2005. 445 Pages.

This publication reports the presentations made at the 5th symposium in honour of Sir Dorabji Tata. The previous four volumes covered Indian tuberculosis (2001), malaria (2002), diarrhoeal diseases (2003), and respiratory diseases (2004). The present volume contains 27 presentations. The subject of this Symposium was Indian visceral leishmaniasis (kala-azar), with its focus in the Northwest Indian State of Bihar. There are still, in 2004, 10,000 cases annually in spite of intense national and international interest in the problem.

The Plenary session given by Drs C.P. Thakur and N.K. Ganguly covered epidemiological issues: the volume and location of kala-azar, the relationship to control measures such as insecticide spraying, and the possibility that further control measures might eliminate this anthroponotic disease. The Keynote address by Dr R. Ridley concerned the approach of Tropical Disease Research (TDR) at WHO in dealing with the disease burden of HIV, TB, malaria, the trypanosomid diseases including visceral leishmaniasis, and helminthic diseases. Given the "10%, 90%" problem (10% of the world's medical research funds go for 90% of the world's disease burden), TDR has a crucial role to play, although new non governmental organizations have created a complex mixture of such entities.

Clinical features were presented by Dr P. Desjeux who gave a worldwide overview, and Dr T.K. Jha who discussed Indian kala-azar specifically based on the 14,346 patients he has personally treated. The full-colour photographs illustrating clinical presentations were particularly attractive.

Diagnosis was covered by Drs R. Sivakumar, M. Boelaeart, and J.C. Samantaray. Tables listing the sensitivity and specificity for the large number of diagnostic tests employed, although unreferenced, provide data that the reader will be hard put to obtain elsewhere.

The Treatment session progressed from the clinic back to animal models. Dr Shyam Sundar gave an authoritative review of treatment for kala-azar; Dr S. Croft summarized drug resistance with insights that again would be difficult to find elsewhere; Dr A. Dube reviewed preclincal drug and vaccine models.

The Immunology/Molecular biology session and the Vaccine/Drug session provided overviews and also detailed accounts of laboratory studies. Drs R.C. Mahajan, B. Saha, F. Modabbar, and P.K. Sinha provided overviews, whereas very detailed reports on laboratory advances in biomarkers, macrophage function, gene knockouts, protein and DNA antigens, and drug targets were provided by Drs C. Mandal, S. Roy, P. Salotra, H.K. Majumder, R. Madhubala, and S. Singh.

The final sessions were on Vector biology and on Epidemiology. Dr K. Kishore detailed the biology of the sandfly vector, something about which clinicians are often unaware. Dr Sherchand described vector control measures with their relative advantages and disadvantages. Dr Gupta described

the organization of vaccine trials in India, and Drs N. Karunaweera, Y. Sukthana, and Y. Wagatsuma described the epidemiology of leishmaniasis in the lesser known locales of Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Bangladesh.

In all, this volume provides a thorough review of India kala-azar. The strengths of the volume are the expertise of the symposium presenters, the alteration between general overviews and detailed research presentations both by experts, and the excellent tables and figures.

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