FALSE POSITIVE SEROLOGICAL REACTIONS FOR SYPHILIS IN LEPROSY

BY

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It was proposed at the serological laboratory for the Ceylon Army Command to study the incidence of false positive serological reactions for syphilis given by sera from cases of leprosy. This inquiry, however, had to be closed prematurely because of early demobilization of the unit. As it has not been possible for the writer to record further observations, the available data is tabulated below. Sixty-four specimens of blood from clinically non-syphilitic lepers were supplied by the superintendent of the leprosy hospital at Hendala, Ceylon.

Comment

The high incidence of false positive Wassermann and/or Kahn tests in this series of 64 lepers, as shown in Table I (overleaf), needs no comment as the

Table II

THE QUANTITATIVE TITRES WITH THE SERIAL DILUTIONS OF SERA WITH 0-9 PER CENT. SALINE IN FALSE POSITIVE TYPE OF REACTIONS IN DIFFERENT DISEASES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Total no. of cases</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>120</th>
<th>160</th>
<th>240</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malaria</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small-pox vaccination</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eosinophilia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leprosy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Kahn units in any serum that was positive on dilution were determined according to the formula $S = 4D$, where $S$ was the serum titre in terms of Kahn units and $D$ was the highest dilution ratio giving a 4 plus reaction. This was slightly different from the original method but was adopted by the U.S. Army with Kahn's approval as per Army Pathology laboratory service, current notes, No. 13, October, 1944.

Table III

THE QUANTITATIVE TITRES WITH THE SERIAL DILUTIONS OF SERA WITH DISTILLED WATER IN FALSE POSITIVE TYPE OF REACTIONS IN DIFFERENT DISEASES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Total no. of cases</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>120</th>
<th>160</th>
<th>200</th>
<th>240 or above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malaria</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eosinophilia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small-pox vaccination</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leprosy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
occurrence of this has been recognized by most leprowlogists. It has also been generally acknowledged that the cutaneous type of the disease gives rise to false positive reactions much more often than the neural type. The Kahn verification test (the triple quantitative technique followed by the salt dispersability technique described by Kahn (1944)) was performed in ten cases with a positive standard Kahn test. Seven out of these ten showed the false positive type of reaction; the other three revealed a combination of false positive and luetic types of reactions. The quantitative titres with the serial dilutions of sera with 0-9 per cent. saline varied from 4 to 240 units as shown in Table II. Seven out of these cases showed titres of 40 or more. This was unlike the low titres usually observed in sera showing false positive reactions in malaria, small-pox vaccinations, and eosinophilia as shown in Table II and described elsewhere by the writer (1947, 1948) in detail.

The quantitative titres with the serial dilutions of sera with distilled water were also much higher than were observed in other conditions exhibiting false positive reactions, as shown in Table III.

During work with sera from malaria, eosinophilia, and small-pox vaccinations, it was found that false positive reactions in these diseases are usually associated with low titres (4 Kahn units or less). This however, has not been so with leprosy, in which higher titres have been met with.

Summary

Results of Wassermann and Kahn tests in sixty-four cases of leprosy have been tabulated. Kahn verification tests were performed in ten of these sixty-four cases. The quantitative titres with the serial dilutions of sera with 0-9 per cent saline and distilled water respectively were found to be comparatively higher than those observed in sera showing false positive reactions in malaria, small-pox vaccination, and eosinophilia.

I take this opportunity to thank Dr. D. S. De Simon, Medical Superintendent, Leprosy Hospital, Hendala, Ceylon, the medical officers attached to the hospital, and Sergeant Jansen, Ceylon Medical Corps, without whose co-operation it would not have been possible to take up this inquiry.

References


(1947). Ibid., 82, 609.
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