First African Regional Conference on Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Inauguration of the African Branch of the International Union against the Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses

The First African Regional Conference on Sexually Transmitted Diseases and the establishment of the African Branch of the International Union against the Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses (IUVDT) took place at the conference centre of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, from 21 to 26 August 1979. The conference had been carefully planned by Professor A O Osoba and his colleagues and the arrangements and the management of the meetings were of the highest standards.

The conference was well attended and over 70 members were present in addition to many paramedical participants. Twenty-two nations were represented and there were three members from the USA, two from France, and one each from Belgium, Brazil, and the United Kingdom. The IUVDT was represented by the President, Dr R D Catterall.

Opening and guest speakers

The conference was opened by Professor S O Olayide, the acting vice-chancellor of the University of Ibadan, who welcomed the participants to the university campus. The very high prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) throughout the world and particularly in Africa was stressed by Dr M O Ogunlana, honourable commissioner for health, Oyo State, Nigeria. Professor C O Enwonwu, director of the National Institute of Medical Research of Nigeria, discussed the importance of accurate statistics and the scope for research in the subject, which had been neglected in the past.

The guest speakers included Dr R D Catterall (London), who described the constitution, history, and present activities of the Union, Professor Corintha Santos, director of the regional office for Latin American, Dr Paul J Wiesner, director, Venereal Disease Control Division, Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, Georgia, USA, who spoke on the challenge of STD control in developing countries, and Dr A Siboulet, director of the Institut Alfred Fournier, Paris, who discussed epidemiological treatment of patients with STD and some new and current aspects of gonococci.

Later Mr E O Nkposong, consultant urologist, University College Hospital, Ibadan, described post-inflammatory causes of infertility and the whole day's proceedings were characterised by lively and well informed discussion.

The meetings

On the following day Dr R D Catterall (London) spoke on the world situation of the sexually transmitted diseases and Dr R Widiwersky, World Health Organisation medical officer, Bangui, Central African Republic, described the management of gonorrhoea in Africa. Papers by Dr Corintha Santos on STD in Latin America and on STD in Africa by Professor I Diop-Mar, Clinique des Maladies Infectieuses, University of Dakar, followed.

A whole session was devoted to Togamycin (spectinomycin) in the management of gonorrhoea in Africa and a lively discussion followed. It was suggested that this injectable drug should be used in treatment failures with penicillin and when β -lactamase strains were isolated.

Papers on STD in Africa were contributed by Dr E E Omer (Khartoum), Dr R V Ratnam (Lusaka), Professor O Ogunbi (Lagos), Professor A Meheus (Swaziland), Dr K O Alausa (Ibadan), Dr R M Rafols (Lesotho), and Dr T T A Elemile (Ibadan).

Dr K O Alausa (Ibadan) discussed vulvo-vaginitis in children in Ibadan and Dr Anne Retel-Laurentin (Paris) the medical and social complications of STD in Haute-Volta.

Dr C S S Bello (Zaria), presented a paper on the results of an investigation into the knowledge of STD among practising doctors in the northern states of Nigeria and there were papers on chlamydial infection and trichomoniasis.

Dr M Gedebo (Addis Ababa) and Professor H Nsanze (Nairobi) painted a sombre picture of the spread of antibiotic resistance in their countries.

Contact-tracing in developing countries was vividly described by Mrs I O Ajayi (Ibadan), and Professor A Z Meheus (Antwerp) discussed gonorrhoea control based on simplified health technology.

Business meeting of the African Union

A business meeting of the African Union against the Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses was held on the last day of the conference and was chaired by Dr R D Catterall, President of the IUVDT.

The following resolutions were passed and are to be widely circulated:

- (1) The African Union against the Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses calls the attention of African governments to the high incidence and serious consequences of sexually transmitted diseases in Africa and hereby expresses its concern at this situation.
- (2) The Union therefore calls upon African governments to try to rectify this situation by providing increased resources and facilities for free diagnosis and treatment.
- (3) The Union recommends that all African governments institute a campaign to enlighten health personnel and the general public, especially through youth organisations and institutes, about the hazards of sexually transmitted diseases using all available means of communication.
- (4) The Union calls on all institutions responsible for training health personnel to review and up-date their sexually transmitted diseases training programmes and to encourage and intensify research into sexually transmitted diseases.

The following were elected officers of the African Union for a period of two years: President, Professor I Diop-Mar (Senegal); Vice Presidents, Dr A Lama (Guinea) and Professor H Nsanze (Kenya); Secretary-general, Professor A O Osoba (Nigeria); Assistant Secretary-generals, Dr B Ndiaye (Senegal) and Professor V L Ongom (Uganda); Treasurer, Professor A B O Oyediran (Nigeria); Councillors, Professor A D W Acholonu (Nigeria), Professor M Gedebo (Ethiopia) Dr E E Omer (Sudan), and Professor V L Ongom (Uganda).

The proposed constitution was unanimously adopted, subject to the French version being approved by the French-speaking officers of the Union.

The next African regional conference will be held in 1981 in Dakar, Senegal, at a date to be decided.

Social programme

Several excellent films were shown and there was an extensive programme, which included cocktail parties, a luncheon, and a dinner. On the final day there was an excursion to Ile-Ife to visit the museum and the University of Ife.

The conference was widely reported on television, radio, and in the press and provoked a lively interest in the medical profession and among the lay public.

Comment

The formation of the African Union against the Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses as the African Branch of the IUVDT is an important occasion in African medical history. The conference indicated that there is a high prevalence of infection in all African countries and that in most areas the facilities are totally inadequate or non-existent. There is an increasing awareness and a greater interest in the subject among doctors and para-medical workers.

Many of the most up-to-date clinics for sexually transmitted diseases in Africa are staffed and directed by members of the department of microbiology. In some teaching hospitals the equipment and premises have improved but in most clinics either there is no equipment at all or what is available is hopelessly inadequate. In many clinics very large numbers of patients are seen daily and the problem is growing rapidly.

The First African Regional Conference was a great success and had been carefully prepared and planned by Professor A O Osoba. It could be the start of a new era in Africa for the diagnosis, treatment, and management of patients with sexually transmitted diseases and might eventually lead to their control throughout the continent.

R D Catterall