STD—seventh national conference of the Indian Association

Report of the seventh national conference of the Indian Association for the study of sexually transmitted diseases held at Bombay, India, on 26 and 27 February 1983

India is an immense country over twice the size of the European Economic Community. Its population, now more than 640 millions, accounts for a sixth of all mankind and is estimated to be increasing by nearly a million every four weeks. First impressions can be overwhelming and there appear to be too many people, too many animals, too many customs, too many gods; in fact, too much of everything. And yet there is only one India, a land of romance and dreams, of terrible poverty and great wealth, a free and democratic nation nearly overwhelmed with heat, poverty, and disease. Despite an illiteracy rate of over 65% and the existence of 14 major languages and 544 dialects, great progress has been made in industrial development, agriculture, science, and medicine. The diversity of India is tremendous and no statement about it is ever completely true.

Background

Throughout India the specialty of dermatovenereology is established in the hospitals and in private practice. In reality this means dermatology for both sexes and venereology for men. In many clinics and in private practice over 90% of the venereology patients are men, and contact tracing is not carried out in most cases. Some women with sexually transmitted diseases (STD) are seen by gynaecologists but communication between dermatovenereologists and gynaecologists about patients is non-existent. The exception is in Madras where dermatology and venereology are separate and the standards of practice at the world famous Institute of Venereology are an example to everyone.

There is a growing awareness of the importance of STD in India both in the medical profession and among the general public. Discussion of the diseases is

becoming easier and less embarrassing and some of the taboos and inhibitions are slowly disappearing. Standards of care for patients vary from place to place but the vast majority of centres are mainly concerned with male patients and prostitutes.

Seventh national conference

The seventh national conference of the Indian Association for the Study of Sexually Transmitted Diseases was held in the West End Hotel, Bombay, on 26 and 27 February 1983, and 110 delegates took part. The conference was opened by Dr Prabhakar S Pai, the mayor of Bombay, who said that it was fitting that such a conference should be held in this city with its fluid population and great mixture of races. The incidence of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) was certainly high in Bombay although accurate figures were not available.

Professor C N Sowmini, the president of the association, welcomed the new members and especially the overseas visitors who had come to support the conference. She stressed the fact that the incidence and range of the diseases was still increasing throughout the world and India was no exception to this trend.

The Silver Jubilee oration of the Institute of Venereology of Madras was given by Dr B A Daruvala, a senior and greatly respected physician, who reviewed the changes in diagnosis and treatment since the end of the second world war.

There followed a series of papers on the incidence of STD among industrial workers, coal miners, and residents in an urban slum community. There was also a symposium on the role of chlamydiae and mycoplasmas in genital inflammatory disease.

VIRAL DISEASES

Dr R D Catterall (London) gave the first guest lecture on sexually transmitted viral diseases and described in detail the new hepatitis B vaccine, which appears to be both effective and safe. He drew attention to the fact that this vaccine was the first

type of immunisation that could prevent the eventual development of cancer, in the form of a primary liver cell carcinoma. There followed some discussion of sexual neuroses and impotence after STD and the extent of knowledge about STD in various sections of the community.

PPNG AND AIDS

The second guest lecture, on newer developments in sexually transmitted diseases, was given by Dr William O Harrison of the United States Navy (San Diego). He described the deteriorating situation with regard to penicillinase producing strains of gonococci (PPNG) and the increase in the number of strains resistant to many antibiotics. The relatively new and often fatal AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) was discussed in detail. More than 800 cases and over 400 deaths had been reported in California. The cause of the condition is completely unknown, and many aspects of the disease are baffling. A reception and banquet were held at the Ward Room INSH, Ashwini, Colaba, and discussion continued far into the night.

The second day was characterised by a series of papers on the relationship of STD to disorders of various systems, such as the cardiovascular, central nervous, and reproductive systems. It was apparent that the late effects of syphilis were now rare in India as elsewhere. A wide ranging and often humorous paper on sexual myths unmasked by Dr Prakash Kothani was greatly appreciated by the audience.

CHANGING PATTERNS OF STD

There followed the third guest lecture by Dr R D Catterall on the changing patterns of STD in the world, in which it was pointed out that the old venereal diseases, syphilis, gonorrhoea, and chancroid, provided only 16% of the work of modern clinics and most cases were now due to infections with the newer sexually transmitted diseases, such as chlamydiae, genital herpes, hepatitis B, and more recently AIDS.

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The final session was devoted to interesting cases which ranged from leucomelanoderma of the palms and soles in secondary syphilis to gummatous ulceration of the tongue. It included a case of lymphangioma circumscriptum of the female genitalia and a case of unilateral orchitis in secondary syphilis.

Future meeting

There can be no doubt that the seventh national conference was a great success and

the Indian Association for the Study of Sexually Transmitted Diseases is now firmly established as an important promoter of an annual conference for those interested in the diagnosis, treatment, and control of STD. It was attended by dermatovenereologists, venereologists, epidemiologists, physicians, microbiologists, and others. Its broadly based outlook, the quality of the communications, and the discussion reflect great credit on Indian medicine and on Dr J K Maniar the organiser.

At the annual general meeting of the IASSTD Dr B S Varma (Baroda) was elected president of the association and the next national conference will be held in Baroda in 1984.

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