

AN INQUIRY INTO THE ADOPTION OF THE TERM **MYCOBACTERIUM HANSENI**

A. ROTBERG*

ABSTRACT — An inquiry was made among various organs of the Public Health Service of the State of S. Paulo, Brazil, members of the Scientific Council and Editorial Board of "Hansenologia Internationalis", and Professors of Dermatology, Bacteriology, Neurology, Pathology and Preventive Medicine of Brazil, having in view the possibility of using the term **Mycobacterium hansenii** in that periodical, as a substitute for **Mycobacterium leprae**. The results were considered favorable to the change and led to the adoption of the new term by the Institute of Health, which publishes the periodical. The First Congress of Hansenology of the Endemic Countries and the Third Brazilian Congress of Hansenology, held in Rio de Janeiro, November 1980, were informed of the change and resolved to introduce **Myco. hansenii** as a synonym for **Myco.leprae**, upon a recommendation of their Workshops on Bacteriology. Appeals are made to the International Committee of Systematic Bacteriology and Societies of Bacteriology of the whole world to study the grave moral, social, medical and preventive problems caused by the "bacteriological stigma" in endemic Christian countries.

Key words: **Mycobacterium hansenii**. **Mycobacterium leprae**. Bacteriological terminology.

The following editorial appeared in "Hansenologia Internationalis" 3 (2) : 119-121, 1978.

Hansen's Mycobacterium : "Mycobacterium hansenii?"

In an international inquiry² about a new terminology to replace "leprosy" and derivatives, 63.1 % of the 195 respondents (out of the 286 addressed) agreed with the name "Mycobacterium hansenii" for the mycobacterium discovered by Hansen in 1873. To his "yes", the late Professor W. Feldman added a copy of a previous letter of his sent to the Journal of the American Medical Association (153:1041, 1953). This letter was abstracted in the Interna

tional Journal of Leprosy (22:105, 1954) by Sister Hilary Ross, who, incidentally, also answered "yes" to the substitute names, the bacillus' included.

"Feldman, W. H. Hansenosis for leprosy. J. American Med. Assoc., 153:1041, 1953.

The writer shares in the general objection to the use of eponyms in designating diseases, but he believes that a less opprobrious term than "leprosy" is desirable providing it has taxonomic acceptance. The microorganism of leprosy is correctly placed in the genus "Mycobacterium". The objectionable feature is the name of the species, which is "leprae". As a way around this difficulty, the name of the species might be changed to "hansenii", in honor of its discoverer. The disease which it produces could then properly be designated

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"Hansenosis", which the author believes would be correct in a taxonomic sense and would meet the objections of those who, for eponymic reasons, dislike the name of Hansen's disease." (Sr. Hilary Ross).

With this support and also on the advice of Professor Otto G. Bier, the undersigned addressed a letter to the Judicial Commission of the International Committee on Systematic Bacteriology: "I would very much appreciate your opinion about the possibilities of a change in the bacteriological nomenclature, aiming especially at the substitution of the name of the species "leprae" and, if possible, at the introduction of a genus "Hansenia" or a species "hansenii", so that some of the suggested substitutes for "leprosy" ("hanseniasis", "hansenosis", "hansenia") could stand on a taxonomical basis."

The answer, although sympathetic, was negative: "I am writing to let you know that the Judicial Commission discussed informally but sympathetically the problem you raised about the changing of the name of the Leprosy bacillus, but came to the conclusion that a scientific name should not be changed except if it causes confusion; the Commission did not feel that such a case had been made out, and that whatever name it received would soon become associated with the disease in the minds of ordinary people" (Professor P.H.A. Sneath, Leicester, England; 10th January, 1974).

Consequently, no more attempts have been made since to alter the international name for the bacillus.

In the meantime, the term "leprosy" was officially banned from Brazil, Portugal, the United States Public Health Service, and many services of Latin America and Cameroon*. The time might be ripe, therefore, to reopen the

question. The name "*Mycobacterium leprae*" hangs as a permanent threat to the solidity and efficacy of those terminological breakthroughs and as a heavy link with a past of obscurantism and opprobrium.

Feldman's substitute name "*Mycobacterium hansenii*" appears in two articles of this issue, but will not be used editorially unless a majority of our Scientific Council and Editorial Board accept it and justify a proposition to the government of the State of S. Paulo, eventually to the government of Brazil.

Accordingly, this editorial is being addressed to all chairs of Bacteriology, Pathology, Dermatology, Neurology and Preventive Medicine in this country. Comments from any other reader of "*Hansenologia Internationalis*", in Brazil and abroad, will be warmly welcome and considered for publication.

If the results of this new inquiry lead to an official "*Mycobacterium hansenii*", it will not be the first time that internationally approved names are relinquished in this country. For many years Brazil, at first with Argentina, later with all other Latin-American countries adhered to Rabello's "polar" classification — "tuberculoid", "lepromatous" (now Virchowian in Brazil) and "indetermined" — while the rest of the world continued to use the terms "nodular", "neural", "cutaneous", etc. — up until the Havana Congress, 1948, made the Latin-American (later Pan-American) classification international. In the taxonomical field, "*Paracoccidioides brasiliensis*" was the name given to the agent of South American Blastomycosis (*paracoccidioidomycosis*) by Florian de Almeida; the new name was rapidly adopted by all Brazilian and foreign

(*) After this editorial had been published, the term "leprosy" was also officially banned from Italy, Bolivia, Jamaica and Trinidad-Tobago. Cameroon was not confirmed.

authors. "*Paracoccidioides brasiliensis*" is now the international substitute for the former "*Blastomyces brasiliensis*" and "*Zymonema brasiliensis*".

Hopes that the Judicial Commission will revise its policies are not being given up. True, there is no terminological confusion regarding "*Myco. leprae*". But a much more serious and noxious confusion exists with the biblical "*lepra*", which, as is known, was only a degrading blemish on stones, garments and skins, and had no relationship whatsoever with any special disease of man. Chances that the biblical world would ever modify age old texts and correct what Gramberg¹ calls a "historical confusion of ideas", were always supposed to be negligible — until the New English Bible (1970) spontaneously made the changes eliminating "*lepers*" and "*leprosy*" of the Old Testament. Recent editions of the Catholic Bible have gone as far as expelling the "*lepers*" from the New Testament as well.

The cooperation of the Judicial Commission would certainly be most welcome, as it would accelerate the process of liberating a common human disease from a past of ignominy and infamy inextricably bound to the word "*lepra*", a word which has always caused much more suffering and distress than the disease itself.

It is hoped that the results of this new inquiry authorize "*Hansenologia Internationalis*" to adopt Feldman's "*Mycobacterium hansenii*". Otherwise, the evading term "*Hansen's mycobacterium*" shall be used. "*Mycobacterium leprae*", i.e., the mycobacterium of superstition and leprostigma, will never be used by its present editors.

A. ROTBERG

METHOD

Copies of the editorial (in Portuguese, p. 116-118 of the same number) were addressed, from March through July 1980, to:

a) Organs of the Public Health Service of the State of S. Paulo, Brazil (Committee on Hansenology, Coordination of Technical Services, Institute of Health, Institute Adolpho Lutz, Institute Butantan)

b) Forty-eight members of the Scientific Council of "*Hansenologia Internationalis*"

c) Three members of its Editorial Board

d) Three hundred and fifty chairs or departments of Dermatology, Neurology, Microbiology, Pathology and Preventive Medicine of 70 Brazilian medical schools, via the schools' administrations *

e) One hundred and twenty chairs of Bacteriology and Pathology of 60 Brazilian odontological schools, via the schools' administrations *

A question ("Do you approve the initiative of '*Hansenologia Internationalis*' of editorially adopting the term '*Mycobacterium hansenii*'?") and space for an eventual comment accompanied the copy of the editorial.

Readers of the periodical in general, did not receive the question but, according to the editorial, were invited to give their opinions.

The answers and comments received up to September 30, 1980 were considered for this publication. The results figure on the table.

(*) It recently came to the author's knowledge that many chairs did not receive the material

(1) GRAMBERG, K. P. C. A. "Leprosy" and the Bible. *The Bible Translator*, 11(1), Jan., 1960.

(2) ROTBERG, A. "Hanseniasis", the new official name for leprosy in S. Paulo, Brazil. *Derm. Int.*, 8:40-43, 1969.

TABLE
Mycobacterium hansenii?

	Yes	No	Undecided	No answer
Public Health Service (State of S. Paulo, Brazil)				
Committee on Hansenology	1			
Coordination of Technical Services	1			
Institute of Health (Director)	1			
Institute of Health (Departments)	5			
Institute Adolpho Lutz				1
Institute Butantan				1
"Hansenologia Internationalis"				
Responsible-Editor	1			
Scientific Council	28	1		19
Editorial Board	2			1
Professors of Microbiology, Pathology, Dermatology, Neurology and Preventive Medicine (in Brazilian medical schools)	78	3	1	267 *
Professors of Microbiology and Pathology (in Brazilian odontological schools)	12	1		107 *

* It recently came to the author's knowledge that many chairs did not receive the material.

ORGANS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE OF THE STATE OF S. PAULO, BRASIL

The Committee on Hansenology approved the editorial. Its Chairman, Dr. Diltor V. A. Oppromolla writes: "The Committe, at the session of September 1st, 1980 approved the editorial substitution of the term *Mycobacterium hansenii* for *Mycobacterium leprae*. The Committee agrees that the species *leprae* would maintain the prejudices and taboos involving Hanse-

niasis. The conservation of this species while all other terms related to 'leprosy' have been changed, is not justifiable"

The Coordinator of Technical Services (Otávio A. Mercadante) agreed with the change. The Director of the Institute of Health (Cassio M. de Carvalho) writes that "the material clarifies our problems and points out the reasons for the change (to *M. hansenii*) with which I personally agree" but requests the opinion of his staff, whose members (J. Martins de Barros, Walter

Belda, Simão Cohen, Clóvis Lombardi and Carlos Eduardo R. T. Rudge) have also agreed. Dr. Rudge adds : "Coherently with the adopted modern terminology".

The Institutes Adolpho Lutz and Butantan did not respond.

THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

Out of the 48 members of the Scientific Council, 28 favored the change (in alphabetical order) :

Mauricio M. A. Alchorne, J. Roberto Antonio, J. Martins de Barros, Cesar Bernardi, Walter M. Cantidio, Aldo de Sá Cardoso, Luiz Carlos Cucê, Neusa L. Dillon, Gilberto Fernandes, Aureliano da Fonseca, Tancredo Furtado, Carlos da Silva Lacaz, Walter Leser, André Petrarca de Mesquita, Lorivaldo Minelli, J. Lisbôa Miranda, J. de Brito de A. Moura, R. Garrido Neves, Luiz Henrique C. Paschoal, Antonio Carlos Pereira Jr., Jarbas A. Porto, Nelson Proença, Douglas Puppín, Ney Romiti, Mario Rutowitsch, Sebastião A. Prado Sampaio, Jorge José de Souza Filho, Luiz Augusto N. Teixeira.

One member (Bernardo Beiguelman) disapproved of the change and 19 did not respond (Josefino Aleixo, Fernando Laynes Andrade, Anuar Auad, Rubem David Azulay, Raymundo Martins Castro, Humberto Cerruti, Oswaldo G. Costa, Absalom Filgueiras, Sílvio Fraga, Newton A. Guimarães, Márcio L. Jardim, Olavo Silva Medeiros, Luiz Carlos Pereira, Robson Vieira Porto, Hugo Prado, Oswaldo Serra, Domingos B. Silva, Márcio M. Tolentino, Cláudio J. Tonello).

Twenty one of the responders in favor added comments:

J.R. Antonio (São Paulo) "This (*Myco .hanseni*) and all other terms related to hanseniasis are currently used in our courses. We have managed

to eliminate everything referring to the term 'lepra' and derivatives".

C. Bernardi (R. Grande do Sul) "Yes, in coherence with the new terminology of the disease".

J. Martins de Barros (S. Paulo) "Yes, if the term is internationally adopted, to avoid confusion".

Walter M. Cantidio (Ceará) "It is strange that the change has not already been made".

Aldo de Sá Cardoso (Alagoas): "Everything done to banish the word 'lepra' and derivatives will be a magnificent contribution to science and to the honor of mankind".

Luiz Carlos Cucê (S. Paulo) : "A question of coherence".

Neusa Lima Dillon (S. Paulo) : "Let us withdraw the term which has become a pejorative".

Nélio Faria Espindula (Espírito Santo) "I do not believe that the measure will solve the social problems caused by the disease" (In spite of his pessimistic comment, prof. Espindula voted "yes" for the change).

Gilberto Fernandes (Amazonas): "I enthusiastically approve. Besides being a just homage to Hansen, is would once and for all disentail the abominable pejorative from the disease, the patient and the bacillus".

Aureliano da Fonseca (S. Paulo) "*Myco . hanseni* is a synonym which I have been using for a long time".

Tancredo Furtado (Minas Gerais) : "I fully agree with the arguments of the editorial".

Carlos da Silva Lacaz (S. Paulo) : "My opinion is that there is no objection to the editorial adoption of the binomial *Mycobacterium hanseni*. However, only the International Committee of Systematic Bacteriology has the authority to consolidate such a commendable

modification. Prof. Rotberg should insist on the Committee"

Walter Leser (S. Paulo) : "The adoption of the term *Mycobacterium hansenii* (Feldman) merits unrestricted approbation. It is founded on the reasons well known to all who follow the fight waged by Rotberg for many years, with intelligence, altruism and pertinacity, aiming at the removal of the barriers that block the prevention of hanseniasis, engendered by superstition, prejudice and ignorance".

José Lisbôa Miranda (Rio de Janeiro) : "The rigid rules of nomenclature will make it difficult to modify the binomial *Mycobacterium leprae*. However, it pays to try to abolish *leprae*, due to its stigmatizing connotation".

João de Brito de A. Moura (Paraíba): "I congratulate you on this new initiative. It is another battle won, among so many others".

René Garrido Neves (Rio de Janeiro): "Changing the name of the etiological agent will face strong international opposition, but I think that we should use *M. hansenii* for a simple question of coherence with 'Hanseniasis', the official Brazilian name of the disease".

Luiz Henrique C. Paschoal (S. Paulo): "If 'Hanseniasis' is the official name of the disease, the change (to *M. hansenii*) is logical".

Jarbas Porto (Rio de Janeiro): "I fully agree with you, again. A question of coherence".

Douglas Puppín (Espírito Santo) : "I agree and I have already adopted the term *M. hansenii* in the discipline of dermatology".

Mario Rutowitsch (Rio de Janeiro) : "Why keep the loathsome *leprae* instead of the natural, logical and intuitive *hansenii*? At least for coherence I support in *totum* the new term *Myco. hansenii*".

Jorge José de Souza Filho (Santa Catarina): "It is obvious! I fully agree".

Luiz Augusto Nunes Teixeira (Rio de Janeiro) : Yes, coherently with the term 'Hanseniasis' ".

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Two out of the three members of the Editorial Board (Walter Belda and Diltor V. A. Opromolla) favored the taxonomical change. Dr. Opromolla comments: "I think that the species *hansenii* is much more 'real' than *leprae*".

No answer was received from Dr. Raul N. Fleury.

MEDICAL SCHOOLS

Out of the 350 addressed, 78 responded favorably, 3 were against, one was undecided, 267 did not respond up to September 30, 1980 ; many of the addressed did not receive the material. Favorable answers are listed below, by State, in alphabetical order.

Alagoas — Aldo de Sá Cardoso, Ana Dayse Rezende Dorea.

Bahia — Egydio Velloso Leal, Jayme Martins Vianna.

Ceará — Walter de Moura Cantídio, Washington Carneiro Baratta Monteiro.

Espírito Santo — Nelio Faria Espindula, Lamartine Palhano Jr., Douglas Puppín, William Sassine.

Maranhão — Rosário de Maria Lobato.

Minas Gerais — Jarbas Brito, Carlos Américo Veiga Damasceno, Tancredo Furtado, Otacilio Moreira Guimarães, Simão de Carvalho Luz, Rodolfo Pereira Mendes, Armando Ribeiro dos Santos.

Paraíba — João de Brito de Athayde Moura, Fernando Rabello.

Paraná — Osmar Bach, Lorivaldo Minelli, Casemiro Tibinka, Nilton Torner, Alceu Schwab.

Pernambuco — Manoel Ricardo Costa Carvalho, Simão Foigel, Virgílio José Coutinho de Oliveira.

Rio Grande do Sul — Raul Fernando Aguirre, Daoiz Mendoza Amaral, Nora Gilce Portella de Oliveira Amaral, Cesar Bernardi, Maria Marta Santos Boffo, Dilma Torres Caetano, Luiz Oswaldo V. Coelho, Paulo Sérgio Crusius, Kurt Kloetzel, Lauro Carlos Kolling, No Gomes de Mattos, Sandra M. Mendonça, Theresinha M.B. Mota, Marilene Ughini Villarroel.

Rio de Janeiro — Lelio Antonio Gomes, José Lisbôa Miranda, Renê Garrido Neves, Antonio Carlos Pereira Jr., Jarbas Porto, Luiz Augusto Nunes Teixeira, Samuel Penha Valle.

Santa Catarina — Lucio José Botelho, Jorge José de Souza Filho.

São Paulo — Mauricio M. A. Alchorne, João Roberto Antonio, José Martins de Barros, Geraldo Amando de Barros Filho, Walter Belda, Vilma Teixeira de Camargo, Luiz Carlos Cucê, Neuza Lima Dillon, Aureliano da Fonseca, Marcelo Fabiano de Franco, Carlos da Silva Lacaz, Clovis Lombardi, José Maria Marlet, Aulo Augusto Caetano de Mello, Norma Gerusa da Silva Mota, Rui de Oliveira, Luiz Henrique C. Paschoal, Gil Vital Alvares Pessôa, Walter de Paula Pimenta, Nelson Proença, Luiz Ribeiro, Ney Romiti, Sebastião Almeida Prado Sampaio, Eneo Alves da Silva Jr., João Antonio Stamato Filho, Jorge Timenetsky.

Brasília (Federal District) — Izelda Marta Carvalho Costa, Raimunda Nonata Ribeiro Sampaio.

Twenty six of these professors added comments to their votes.

Geraldo Amando de Barros Filho — (S. Paulo) — "The term *Myco. leprae*

must be banished from any medical or lay text, due to its humiliating and outcasting connotation".

Vilma Ilka Teixeira de Camargo (S. Paulo) : "A more appropriated nomenclature".

Oswaldo V. Coelho — (R. Grande do Sul) — "Yes, for the same reasons that have served to eliminate the terminology 'leprosy' and its historical connotation".

Ana Dayse Rezende Dorea — (Alagoas) — "It is a homage to Hansen and a further step toward the proscription of a cruel and injurious term".

Marcelo Fabiano de Franco — (S. Paulo) — "It is a commendable and coherent initiative that I support".

Otacilio Moreira Guimarães — (Minas Gerais) — "A valid reason, considering both the humane aspect of the disease and the homage to the discoverer of the bacillus".

Lauro Carlos Kolling — (R. Grande do Sul) — "A simple question of coherence and common sense".

Egydio Velloso Leal — (Bahia) — "Besides the obvious reasons, a just homage to the great man Hansen".

Simão de Carvalho Luz — (Minas Gerais) — "Yes, to prevent the social stigmatization of the patients and to facilitate their cooperation in therapy".

Aulo Augusto Caetano de Mello — (S. Paulo) "Hanseniasis is a disease like any other. The stigma of 'leprosy' is a social problem."

Rodolfo Pereira Mendes — (Minas Gerais) — "I fully agree".

Washington Carneiro Baratta Monteiro - (Ceará) - "The substitution will complete the right proscription of the word 'leprosy', already official in some countries".

Norma Gerusa da Silva Mota — (*S. Paulo*) — "Any changes that might attenuate the suffering caused by the word 'lepra' or any of its derivatives are commendable and must be supported".

Virgílio José Coutinho de Oliveira — (*Pernambuco*) — "Doubtless a just homage to Hansen".

Lamartine Palhano Jr. — (*Espírito Santo*) "Besides being a homage to Hansen, the nonutilization of the terminology 'lepra' apparently prevails both in the scientific and in the lay areas".

Fernando Rabello — (*Paraíba*) — "I fully agree".

Luiz Ribeiro — (*S. Paulo*) "Anything to remove the stigma of 'leprosy' is commendable".

William Sassine — (*Espírito Santo*) — "It is necessary to extinguish the term *M. leprae*, a reminder of the 'biblical disease'".

Armando Ribeiro dos Santos — (*Minas Gerais*) — "I believe that everything should be done to eliminate the cruel stigma but I am not very optimistic about the results of the proposed change. Only an extensive educational campaign on hanseniasis will eliminate the stigma".

Alceu Schwab — (*Paraná*) — "The editorial 'Hansen's mycobacterium: *M. hansenii*?' is a perfect collocation of the subject".

Eneo Alves da Silva Jr. — (*S. Paulo*) — "Time, development and progress inevitably lead to changes".

Jorge Timenersky (*S. Paulo*) — "The term 'lepra' must be given up, as it is disagreeable to society and patients".

Nilton Tornero — (*Paraná*) — "The term 'lepra' and its derivatives must definitely be eliminated from the scientific literature".

Samuel Penha Valle — (*Rio de Janeiro*) — "A just homage to its discoverer".

Jayme Martins Vianna — (*Bahia*) — "Both terms are correct, but *hansenii* is preferable, as it is less known by the layman".

ODONTOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

Out of the 120 addressed, 12 favored the change, 1 was against, 107 did not respond. As in the case of the medical schools, many chairs did not receive the questionnaire.

Favorable respondents are listed below by State, in alphabetical order.

Minas Gerais — Helena Caetano de Carvalho, Carlos Américo Veiga Damasceno, João Evangelista Fiorini.

Rio de Janeiro — Aristeo Gonçalves Leite.

S. Paulo — Olavo Bergamaschi Barros, Celso Soares Brandão, Izabel Yoko Ito, Antonio Lazaro Valeriani Marques, Renato Orsi, José Paradella, Nelson Santos Pugliesi, Sérgio Luiz de Souza Salvador.

Most respondents added comments :

Olavo Bergamaschi Barros (*S. Paulo*) — "*M. hansenii* is less blunt".

Celso Soares Haberbeck Brandão (*S. Paulo*) "The opinion of the eminent Antonio Vieira is sufficient to show the merits of the highly praisable campaign waged by Prof. Rotberg against the horrendous word" *

(*) Father Antonio Vieira (1608.1697) was a famous Catholic preacher and writer born in Portugal and brought up in colonial Brazil, where he died. The passage excerpted by Prof. Haberbeck Brandão from "Sermões" ("Sermons") is probably the earliest public condemnation of the application of the pejorative "lepra" to the sick. It will be translated later for "Hansenologia Internationalis".

Hédima Caetano de Carvalho (Minas Gerais) "I agree that we have to completely eliminate any reference to the biblical name "leprosy", which, due to its related stigma, brings only suffering to the patient. It is about time to engage ourselves in the fight of Prof. Rotberg to change this horrifying name which, although not confusing in the international terminology, causes confusion 'in the head' of the patient and public. I not only agree but also work for that change to occur."

João Evangelista Fiorini (Minas Gerais) — "I believe that the change (to *M. hanseni*) will further minimize the stigma carried by the term 'lepra'".

Aristeo Gonçalves Leite (Rio de Janeiro) — "The discoverers must always be honored. It is a primary obligation of civilization".

Renato Orsi (São Paulo) — "If the name of the disease has changed, the name of its etiological agent must also be changed".

José Paradella (São Paulo) — "If the disease is now called 'Hanseniasis' a taxonomic basis should be provided".

Nelson Santos Pugliesi (S. Paulo) — "The initiative is commendable, for obvious reasons".

FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE NAME

MYCOBACTERIUM LEPRAE

Four professors of medical schools (Adonis R. Lira de Carvalho, José Carlos Machado, Izaias Ortiz Pinto and Ananias Pereira Porto), and one of an odontological school (Moacyr Porto) voted against the change to *M. hanseni*.

Adonis R. Lira de Carvalho (Per-nambuco) — "No. I think that the arguments of the Judicial Committee (to conserve the term *M. leprae*) are just".

Jesus Carlos Machado (S. Paulo) — "No. Except if the International Committee of Nomenclature agrees".

Izaias Ortiz Pinto (R. Grande do Sul) — "No. The nomenclature is eminently technical and the reasons that at the moment served to withdraw the word 'lepra' will disappear with the new approaches to the disease".

Moacyr Porto (S. Paulo) — "No. The term (*M. leprae*) is already firmly grounded and the leprosy 'taboo' is fading away".

Ananias Pereira Porto (S. Paulo) — "No. There are international rules that regulate the subject and impede the change".

Affonso Renato Meira (S. Paulo) — responds that he is "still undecided about the subject".

FROM READERS

Six readers of the editorial, although not personally addressed, sent their opinions, all favorable to the change to *M. hanseni*: Vinicio Brasileiro Martins (Brasil), Morris Margounato (Uruguay), Enrique Luis Fliess, Graciella Elena Gotusso, Minerva de Mangiaterra, Ana Pacin (Argentina). These votes do not figure on Table I. Four of the votes were accompanied by comments.

Graciella E. Gotusso — "The change (to *M. hanseni*) fits the present state of the fight against the disease".

Minerva de Mangiaterra "(The change to *M. hanseni*) is the correct thing to do".

Morris Margounato — "If the disease is called 'Hanseniasis' its agent must be *hanseni*".

Vinicio Brasileiro Martins — "*M. hanseni*? Yes, why not? We, Brazilians, must go ahead with what we

preach — a non-stigmatizing terminology to pave the way for a really efficient health education. When the Anglo-Saxons decide on something they quietly ignore established terms and concepts, which are changed whenever they feel like it. We now use a so-called 'Franck's lancet' but many do not know that its inventor was really Bensaúde, an illustrious Portuguese. The Anglo-Saxons cite the 'Boyle's law, which is in fact Mariotte's. Not considering its eventual scientific value, if the Ridley-Jopling classification had been proposed by a 'Souza' or a 'Novais', would it have been given any attention? Certainly not. Not before an Anglo-Saxon had introduced an irrelevant change and 're-proposed' the same classification under his name. Therefore, let us do what is necessary for our country and stop waiting for the Anglo-Saxon green light".

THE BRAZILIAN SOCIETY OF MICROBIOLOGY

Dr. Antonio Lazaro Valeriani Marques, Professor of the Bauru Faculty of Odontology (S. Paulo), who had agreed with the change, took the initiative of sending the editorial to the Brazilian Society of Microbiology, asking for a study of the problem. The Society appointed Prof. Italo Suassuna to prepare a report for the appreciation of its members.

Prof. Suassuna's report was published (Rev. Bras. Pat. Clin. 16 (4) :192, 1980) and is in general favorable to the new term "Hanseniasis" for the disease, but restrictive as regards the bacillus. The following excerpts are representative:

"The proposition relates to the vile, noxious and undesirable connotation of the name 'leprosy' and derivatives, from the moral and social viewpoints. It should be understood that this pejora-

tive aspect is associated with the disease itself, not with the name of its agent, whose circulation is restricted to the medical and scientific spheres."

"In accordance, I propose that the Brazilian Society of Microbiology keeps the taxonomic designation of the Hansen's disease bacillus, based on international rules, but that it recommends non-taxonomic names, like 'Hansen's bacillus' or others, in documents, requests and results of examinations for the public, to avoid worry and anxiety".

Prof. Suassuna's viewpoint was approved by the Brazilian Society of Microbiology.

THE INSTITUTE OF HEALTH AUTHORIZES THE EDITORIAL USE OF *MYCO. HANSENI*

The editorial, table I and the viewpoint of the Brazilian Society of Microbiology — but no name or comment — were sent to Prof. Walter Belda, who substituted Dr. Cassio M. de Carvalho as Director of the Institute of Health and as "Responsible Editor" of "Hansenologia Internationalis", for the final decision.

Prof. Belda answered on October 31, 1980: "Referring to the substitution of the term *Mycobacterium hansenii* for *Mycobacterium leprae*, I am advising that I am in complete accord with the editorial and with the use of the proposed terminology by 'Hansenologia Internationalis'".

RECOMMENDATIONS OF CONGRESSES

A summary of the editorial, results of the inquiry, opinion of the Brazilian Society of Microbiology, as well as the decision of the Institute of Health, were presented to the First Congress of Hansenology of the Endemic Coun-

tries and the Third Brazilian Congress of Hansenology (Rio de Janeiro, November 1980).

The report was purely informative, but the Committees of Bacteriology of both Congresses showed interest in the matter and included among its recommendations "the use of the term *Mycobacterium hansenii* as a synonym for *Mycobacterium leprae*."

This recommendation, which was unanimously approved at the final plenary session of the Congresses, is considered a very valuable support of the new editorial policy of "Hansenologia Internationalis".

APPEALS

I beg to call the attention of the Ministries of Health or Public Health Services of countries which already have banished the infamous pejoratives "lepra", "leprosy" and "lebbra" — Brazil, United States, Italy, Portugal, Bolivia, Jamaica and Trinidad/Tobago — to the danger represented by the ignominious "*M. leprae*" to their terminological breakthroughs.

I also beg to appeal to the International Committee of Systematic Bacteriology and to the Societies of Bacteriology of the whole world to study the grave moral, social, medical and preventive problems resulting from the permanence of the "bacteriological stigma" in the endemic Christian countries. I understand that there is no taxonomical confusion regarding *M. leprae* which might imply a terminological change, according to the strict

rules of the International Committee. There is, however, a much more serious confusion with the biblical "lepra" — a ritually defiling condition of stones, walls, garments and people, which has nothing in common with Hanseniasis (Hansen's disease). A confusion which continues due to all the deep-rooted and irremovable loathsome and degrading connotations that the biblical "lepra" has conserved throughout the ages.

As aptly pointed out by one of the respondents "although there is no taxonomical confusion, there is 'confusion in the head' of the patient and in society". This confusion is responsible for the shame, the hiding, the aggravation of the disease and of the endemic.

Last, but not least, it might be time to study the possibility of a well-deserved homage to the Norwegian scientist whose name has been unjustifiably dissociated from the bacillus he discovered, and, in most countries, from the disease to whose knowledge he so much contributed.

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RESUMO — Realizou-se inquérito entre vários órgãos da Secretaria de Saúde do Estado de S. Paulo (Brasil), membros dos Conselhos Científico e Editorial de "Hansenologia Internationalis" e professores de Dermatologia, Neurologia, Bacteriologia, Patologia e Medicina Preventiva do Brasil, visando à possibilidade de se usar o termo **Mycobacterium hansenii** naquele periódico, como substituto de **Mycobacterium leprae**. Os resultados foram considerados favoráveis à modificação e permitiram ao Instituto de Saúde a adoção do novo termo. O I Congresso de Hansenologia dos Países Endêmicos e III Congresso Brasileiro de Hansenologia, reunidos no Rio de Janeiro (novembro 1980) e informados da modificação, resolveram introduzir **Myco.hansenii** como sinônimo de **Myco.leprae**, de acordo com recomendação de seus Grupos de Trabalho em Bacteriologia. Apela-se para o Comitê Internacional de Bacteriologia Sistemática e para as Sociedades de Bacteriologia de todo o mundo para que estudem os graves problemas morais, sociais, médicos e preventivos causados pelo "estigma bacteriológico" nos países endêmicos de tradição cristã.

Palavras chave: *Mycobacterium hansenii*. *Mycobacterium leprae*. Terminologia bacteriológica.