

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

With reference to the article 'Precocious tertiary syphilis' by K. Anandam et al, published in Vol. 43, page number 340-341 of 1977 of the Journal, I wish to add that in addition to antilipoidal and antitreponemal antibodies in syphilis, the presence of rheumatoid factor and cryoglobulins has been well documented in literature. Mustakallio et al¹ reported the presence of rheumatoid factor in 10.3% of 241 syphilitic patients. Its presence was unrelated to previous treatment but related to age, being found more often in older persons. Lassus² detected rheumatoid factor in 14 out of 152 cases of early syphilis and cryoglobulins in 24. Their incidence was related to the duration of the infection and common in highly reactive sera. The significances of these antibodies is not known.

- References :
1. Mustakallio KK, Lassus A and Wager O, Int Arch Allergy, 31 : 417, 1967
 2. Lassus A : Int Arch Allergy, 36 : 515, 1969 (quoted in Recent Advances in Sexually Transmitted Diseases by Morton RS and Harris JRW, 1975 p. 146)

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January 11, 1978

P. S. Ranganathan, M.D., D.V.,

Reply

Dear Editor,

Apropos to Dr. Ranganathan's letter, I may state that the case was a diagnostic problem. Fusiform swelling of fingers with pain and tenderness of interphalangeal joints could not be explained on the basis of syphilis alone and hence associated possibility of rheumatoid arthritis was entertained. Rose-Waaler test was consequently done which came out to be surprisingly positive. As syphilis is known to affect only bones and not joints, except in Charcot's arthropathy and rheumatoid, arthritis does quite the reverse, X-ray of hands was done, which showed periosteal new bone formation and punched out areas of cortical rarefaction of phalanges. It is this which confirmed the case to be syphilis. This was further substantiated by excellent response to treatment and by skin biopsy. I have seen the patient one year after the completion of treatment and he is doing well.

Subsequently, we carried out Rose-Waaler test in 20 patients with syphilis and found it positive in 13 with high agglutination titres. No doubt, Rose-Waaler titres rose with V.D.R.L. though this was by no means obligatory. Comment regarding the age would be difficult as all our patients were around and or below thirty.

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January 23, 1978.

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