Infantile Enteritis as a Cause of Thymolymphatic Atrophy

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The thymic weights in 115 infants who died before the first year of life were determined. 37 cases showed moderate to marked thymic atrophy and 22 revealed severe atrophy of the perifollicular lymphocytes of the mesenteric lymph nodes. This was associated in 26 cases with moderate to severe atrophy of the intestinal mucosa due to severe gastroenteritis. The thymic atrophy as judged by X-ray in 53 cases was related to the severity of diarrhoea and malnutrition. The possible role of this common acquired disorder in causing a permanent reduction in the number of instructed thymic-derived lymphocytes and the consequent frequency of disease related to cell mediated immune deficiency as for instance tuberculosis leprosy and certain neoplasms was discussed.