Letter to the Editor

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Albinism and Schizophrenia

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Dear Sir,

The recent paper by Leibowitz, Dogliotti and Hart [Schizophrenia and albinism. *Dermatologica* 156: 367–370, 1978] documented a case of albinism and schizophrenia in a South African Negro patient and noted the rarity of this association. The authors extracted pertinent references from my unpublished doctoral thesis [1] without acknowledgment to my own investigation into albinism and schizophrenia.

In 1970, I made a search for albino schizophrenics among the South African Negro inpatient population of four large psychiatric hospitals whose combined catchment areas virtually covered the entire Transvaal Province of the Republic of South Africa. I was able to locate 6 albino patients with schizophrenia.

The expectancy rate for schizophrenia in the general population is usually taken as 0.85%; the incidence of oculocutaneous albinism in the South African Negro population is 1 in 4,000 [2]. The occurrence of both conditions in the same individual would thus occur randomly in about 1 in 471,000. The South African Negro population of the Transvaal for 1970 (the year of my enquiry) was 4,267,272 [3]: this therefore produces a statistical expectation of 9 subjects with concurrent schizophrenia and albinism. My finding of 6 such patients (derived only from the hospitalized community) would appear to confirm the appearance of the two conditions on a purely chance basis. It certainly does not support the implications of the 'schizophrenia-melanosis' hypothesis (since refuted) of Greiner and Nicolson [4] that schizophrenia and albinism are mutually exclusive; nor does it tend to corroborate the suggestion of Baron [5] of a possible aetiological link between these two disorders. The latter identified a pedigree in which 5 family members over two generations presented with coexistent albinism and schizophreniform psychosis.

Recent research has shown that human albinos have an abnormality in the visual system with resultant disturbances in cerebral electrophysiology [6]. This type of structural anomaly has been alluded to in explaining the association (in two unrelated children) of albinism, retardation and autistic behaviour [7].

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We wish to thank Dr. A.H. Robins for drawing our attention to 6 patients with schizophrenia and albinism of which we were unaware. Our case presentation confirms his observation of the co-existence of the two conditions.

M.Leibowitz, M.Dogliotti and G.Hart