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Penicillin Side Reactions and Fatalities
By O. IDSE and T. GUTHE, Geneva
Notwithstanding the long-term downward trend in the incidence of early infectious syphilis in the last 100 years, there have been periodic recrudescences of this infection in many parts of the world, e.g. the outbreak during the Second World War, and the incidence upswing in recent years in many countries - as documented by the World Health Organization in various publications. We now have a remarkable treatment for syphilitic disease - penicillin - highly effective in individual patients and well tolerated.

The present volume brings together in extended form studies presented at the International Congress of Chemotherapy in Vienna, 1967, brought up to date following the XIII International Congress of Dermatology, Munich, 1967. At the latter congress a main section was devoted to syphilis. Rebus sic stantibus, one may ask if it was worthwhile for Dr. LUGER, Vienna, and his well-known and experienced collaborators to devote an entire volume like the present one to the subject of antibiotic therapy of syphilis and other genital infection, subjects which - in the views of some - perhaps could be more briefly summarized? Those superficially acquainted with the subject may indeed be inclined to answer that most therapy problems appear to have been solved in this field, as far as syphilis is concerned. Yet the recent worldwide recrudescence of this disease, observed in most countries since 1957-1968, points to the need for renewed attention being paid to syphilis therapy. The tapering off of the recrudescence wave or variations in incidence experienced in some countries since 1962-1963, e.g. Switzerland, is offset by remarkable rises in incidence of early syphilis in others, e.g. in Austria from 194 new cases reported in 1959 to 1,123 in 1966 and in Poland from 7,435 cases in 1965 to 12,574
The present volume is important in drawing attention to certain aspects of therapy sometimes overlooked. Some difference of opinion exists in regard to the use of penicillin alone or conjointly with other therapy, and discussions continue by different schools of medical thought concerning dosage, number of injections and other methodological features. On the fact that no change has been observed in the basic treponemicidal power of penicillin there is general scientific agreement. It is indeed remarkable that T. pallidum has not developed antibiotic resistance after the quarter of a century which has passed since J. F. MAHONY et al. introduced it in syphilotherapy in the United States of America in 1943. But should such resistance develop - or for use in cases of penicillin allergy - clear, objective guidance is given by A. LUGER in this volume, based on extensive documentation concerning the use of alternative drugs.

Experts of world-wide reputation, who have had the opportunity of gaining vast experience in the above fields, have contributed chapters of practical importance to this volume and include: T. GUTHE and O. IDSE; T. Z. CAPINSKI and his collaborators: J. LEBIODA, B. KOLASA, E. BUDZANOWSKA; A. PERDRUP and A. LUGER.

In regard to gonococcal infections it is well known that their incidence has in many countries remained stationary or has been increasing. In some developing countries gonococcal as well as other urethritides are indeed extremely common. Nevertheless, gonococcal infections are considered to have become less important since complications are now relatively rare in developed countries. Arthritis and epidymitis are not often seen, but there is evidence that the latter complications as well as female adnexitis are more frequent in developing countries than generally believed to be the case after antibiotics became available. It has been said that acute gonorrhoea can now be cured as quickly as it is acquired. But therapy problems change from year to year and must be constantly assessed. Three aspects stand out: (i) changing susceptibility and increased resistance of gonococci to the available drugs (ii) occurrence of side reactions, their nature and importance (iii) the possibility of gonococcidal drugs being at the same time treponemicidal, affecting an already incubating or a simultaneously acquired syphilitic infection. We owe to R. R.WILLCOX an exhaustive documentation on aspects of these problems which are of practical importance. In a book entitled Antibiotic treatment of venereal diseases, some
may be surprised to find included chapters on trichomoniasis and

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other non-specific genital infections. Perhaps the term venereal disease - often defined differently in different countries in their legislation - is not particularly apt in our times of permissiveness, changed behavioral and social patterns? Would genital infections or sexual diseases be preferable as an all inclusive term in the future as suggested by some? P. DUREL, V. ROIRON, J. COUTURE and M.-T. BASSOULLETS chapter on the treatment of trichomoniasis with metronidazol is an interesting feature of this volume and concerns a highly prevalent genital infection. J. MEYER-ROHNs Causes and treatment of non-specific urethritis of the male provides a practical contribution of wide interest.

Considering the continued very great importance of penicillin in the treatment of several genital infections - and in so many other conditions in a variety of other medical fields - it is fitting that the last chapter of the book should appraise penicillin side reactions and fatalities. This chapter is prepared by O. IDSE and T. GUTHE to whom is due also the first chapter of the present volume. These scientists, who have at their disposal the extensive and valuable material of the World Health Organization in these fields assess international trends, nature and extent of penicillin side effects and place an exhaustive list of useful references at the disposal of those wishing further documentation on drug reactions and allergology.

From a national as well as an international viewpoint it has been an honour - as well as a personal pleasure for me - to write the foreword to this book which will certainly prove a most useful reference volume to colleagues in many lands. Those who consult it will be grateful to Dr. LUGER for editing this clearly presented book and will congratulate him on finding collaborators so fitted to their task.

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