

INTRODUCTION

In Western Europe, which has an approximate population of 300 million, an estimate of new cases of tuberculosis in 1970 was about 150 thousand. The individual countries have met with varying degrees of success in the prevention of the disease (Table 1). Although tuberculosis is no longer a major Public Health problem in Europe it remains the major cause of death among the infectious and parasitic diseases (Table 2). In recognizing that freeing Europe from tuberculosis is the concern of all people in the region, laboratory workers engaged in Mycobacteriology decided to meet once a year to discuss their specific problems. The first meeting took place in 1980 in the Institut für Experimentelle Biologie und Medizin (Borstel, F.D.R.). The European Society of Mycobacteriologists (ESM) was thus born, and this Manual was one of the initial projects. The purpose of the Manual was to assemble those Laboratory and Public Health recommendations which all participants in the meeting agreed would be most useful. The consensus of opinion was that the initiative might help to close the wide gaps in the quality of Laboratory Services still existing within and between various countries. These recommendations were developed by the participants in a private capacity.

A significant number of students come to Europe each year to train in Mycobacteriology. It was felt that it might be useful if they all received the same basic information, and that this should not interfere with other kinds of teaching which they might receive in any Centre according to its professional and scientific profile. This important agreement follows the recognition that the prevention and control of Tuberculosis in the region is intimately related to the improvement of Laboratory Services worldwide.

Although tuberculosis is still of major concern, diseases caused by mycobacteria other than Mycobacterium tuberculosis must also be considered. Their correct diagnosis and an understanding of their epide-

miology are thought to be necessary to develop the means for their treatment and prevention. The extent of the problem is not known, and laboratory workers should be aware of the mycobacterial species involved, if not to identify them, at least to know when to refer them to other laboratories for proper identification. This Manual, therefore, includes information about mycobacteria other than tubercle bacilli.

This ESM Manual was originally written in the English language. It was agreed that it may be translated, without additions or omission, into the various European languages under the direct supervision of the head of the National Reference Laboratory. Distribution of the Manual may be free of charge, or at its cost value. All translations must be made directly from the Master Copy deposited officially in Bilthoven or the duplicate in Paris. Two copies of each translation must be deposited with these two Centres.

The heads of National Reference Laboratories have agreed to use this text as a basic manual in their training programs. In this manner the aim is to achieve a reasonably uniformity of purpose. This basic agreement, however, is not intended to limit additional information or other points of view which may be given in the training of personnel.

Laboratory directors who wish to develop mycobacteriology, may request a collection of strains representative of common mycobacteria from one of the Reference Centres listed in page 102. Depending on policy these cultures are distributed free of charge or for a token fee.