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## NEWS

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### LEPROSY—PROGRESS IN SIGHT

For the first time the multidrug therapy (MDT) has provided opportunities for effective control programmes. Although expensive, it has reduced the treatment period and proved its capacity to overcome drug resistance. Most countries and voluntary organizations have adopted MDT, albeit slowly, because of cost constraints and inadequate health infrastructures.

During the past 3–4 years, over 5,00,000 patients from different countries have been put on MDT and the role of the World Health Organization's in leprosy control is not only to assist in the development of new technology, but also to promote, coordinate and support leprosy control through the new strategy of MDT.

The WHO Leprosy Control Programme is receiving strong support from several bilateral, multilateral and voluntary organizations and from generous foundations. For many years, it has greatly bene-

fited from generous donations made by the Japan Shipbuilding Industry Foundation (JSIF), headed by 87-year-old Mr Ryoichi Sasakawa.

The results on the efficacy of the leprosy vaccine are expected to be available within the next 5–10 years through ongoing field trials in Venezuela and Malawi. Other trials are being contemplated.

With WHO's current new thrust in leprosy control through MDT and its investment in an effective leprosy vaccine for the future, major reductions in the prevalence of leprosy are foreseeable in the near future with a possible perspective on elimination of the disease in the distant future. Therefore, this calls for further intensified efforts to mobilize the additional resources required to implement the programme as well as to strengthen health services at different levels. (WHO Press Release/23, 25 November 1986. World Health Organization Media Service, 1211, Geneva 27, Switzerland).

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### BLOOD CELLS TELL THE DIAGNOSIS

Blood cells of both humans and animals are capable of changing their shape. Studies in this sphere have been carried out at Moscow's Institute of Biological Tests of Chemical Compounds. The experiments consisted in sieving blood through film with minute holes. The blood of healthy people passes even through a close-meshed sieve, the blood cells being highly flexible, while the sick persons' cells lose their flexibility and will be retained on the sieve.

The established inter-relationship between the

shape of the red blood cells and the state of the organism is expected to help in the early diagnosing of a broad range of disorders. Even cardio-vascular diseases reduce cell flexibility.

A variety of sieves for medical purposes is being currently developed. The materials used are mostly synthetic.

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