

2005 CENTENNIAL YEAR MARKING THE DISCOVERY OF THE SPIROCHETE *TREPONEMA PALLIDUM*

Waugh M. (2005) details the seminal discovery by Schaudin and Hoffman of using modification of Giemsa azure-eosin stain from a slightly eroded papule from the labium of a woman with secondary syphilis, who had not yet started treatment with mercurials (1,2). Syphilis as one form of pathologic treponematoses originates from ancient myth and was highlighted in 1530 in a poem by Girolamo Fracastoro "*Syphilis, sive morbus Gallicus*". Syphilis was conquered through years by the magic penicillin management.

In the last two decades, there appears to be an increasing syphilis-HIV interdependency. Indeed, resurgence in the incidence of HIV and syphilis has been reported from eastern European countries and the United States during the past several years, the majority of them in homosexual men (1,3). Jin *et al.* (4) report that up to the early 1980s syphilis was common in homosexual men. By the early 1990s syphilis was rare in Australian homosexual active men, increasing with sexually risky behavior including unprotected anal intercourse with HIV positive partners, leading to the outbreak of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) (4). Since 1998 it has been demonstrated that syphilis is associated with significantly increased seroconversion, pointing to the need of comprehensive STD control strategies for HIV prevention (2). A few years ago much was written about syphilis and involvement of famous people in the past millennium, such as Shakespeare, who sustained mercury poisoning on treatment for syphilis, and Columbus's crew infection. The presence of syphilis will obviously persist into the 3rd millennium.

At the time when mass media portray sexual freedom as glamorous and "in", there is an increasing prevalence of acquired STDs in both young and adult population. Dermatologists and venereologists should intensify their activities in education and prevention for patients engaged in such a behavior, with special reference to syphilis. Also, the Referral Center for Diagnosis of Syphilis of the Ministry of Health and Social Care, seated at Department of Dermatology and Venereology, Zagreb University Hospital Center, has a role in the prevention and counseling together with effective public education to reduce the rate of syphilis and other STDs.

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References

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