

GLOBAL HEALTH HISTORIES SEMINARS

Kala azar: Can visceral leishmaniasis ever be controlled?



Dr R. Killick-Kendrick

Visceral leishmaniasis, also known as kala azar (meaning “black fever”) is an ancient parasitic disease that continues to resist modern control efforts. Transmitted by sand flies, it is most common in south-east Asia, east Africa, and Brazil, but cases also occur in southern European countries. Worldwide there are some 500 000 new cases and 60 000 deaths a year. Left untreated, it can have a fatality reaching 100%.

Two eminent experts share their decades of experience in today’s presentation. Professor Robert Killick-Kendrick, Honorary Research Fellow at Imperial College, London, is a leading parasitologist specializing for many years in the disease, while Dr C.P. Thakur, Emeritus Professor of Medicine and former Minister of Health in India, helped revolutionize treatment of the condition.

Together they trace the history of attempts control it back to the 18th century and pose questions about current efforts. Sandflies were proven to be the vectors in the 1940s, and the main response was house-spraying with DDT. More recently, increasing concerns about environmental contamination mean spraying is constantly under critical challenge, leading to the search for other solutions.

Co-organized with The Wellcome Trust; the Wellcome Centre for the History of Medicine at University College London; the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine at the University of Oxford, together with the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, and the Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases at WHO.

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