

Multiple Sclerosis: Prevention of Serious Illness — Vision of a Desired Future for Newly Ascertained Patients

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Abstract — The increased prevalence of MS worldwide and the resultant high frequency of serious illness among young adults urges that the developed methods of prophylaxis are fully tested. Reference is made to the hypothesis of a circulating toxin playing a role in disease development. Insights from basic research now in progress may expand or amend the scenario. This discussion pertains to biological reasoning and a prophylactic treatment which is able to postpone or avoid disability in MS.

Introduction

20 years ago Henzi* wondered about the relevance of the similarity of the clinical phases of optic neuritis in multiple sclerosis (MS) and in methanol poisoning and whether this observation might lead to an aetiological explanation and ultimately to a useful therapy. The following statistics and discussions pertain to MS as a biological phenomenon.

100 years ago the affliction we call MS was uncommon and medical professionals in Switzer-

*Hugo Henzi, as a medical doctor and a family man, became involved with MS in the 1940's. In the 1960s he made the observations which led him to believe in a link between MS and a form of methanol poisoning. Attempts to bring the facts together and caring for patients became '*raison d'être*'.

Due to illness he retired from patient care in 1989. He passed away on 10 May 1991.

land considered the condition as a curiosity. This changed in the following 3 decades and by 1921 the result of a countrywide investigation gave a prevalence of 23 MS-patients per 100 000 inhabitants. The investigation was repeated in 1957; by then the prevalence had risen to 50 per 100 000. In the yearly report of the Swiss MS-Society of 1983 the estimate was given, that the prevalence had now risen to between 130 and 170 per 100 000. This is reflected at the Society's meetings where the plight of handicapped MS-patients and wheelchair cases is exposed.

The observation that the more recent investigations show a higher MS prevalence has been reported in various countries (1, 2, 3). MS is the most common and dreaded demyelinating disease of young adults.

The therapy—results of Henzi (1) and others seem to suggest that if prophylaxis against relapses is,

