

Correspondence

Diagnosis of opportunistic infections in HIV/AIDS

Sir,

We read with great interest the article "Progress in diagnosis of opportunistic infections in HIV/AIDS" and the reference to non-tuberculous mycobacteria (NTM)¹. With the changing scenario due to AIDS pandemic, it is now becoming imperative that we generate data on these opportunistic bacteria as they are likely to be important organisms of the future. It is true that there are very few reports from developing countries on NTM from HIV/AIDS patients², but there are at least three published reports from India, one from Tuberculosis Research Centre (TRC), Chennai³, and two from Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (MGIMS), Sevagram^{4,5} where NTM were isolated from various clinical samples from HIV/AIDS patients.

In one of these studies⁴, we had used paraffin baiting technique (Infectech Identikit™ USA) to isolate NTM from 80 stools and 42 sputum samples from HIV seropositive tuberculosis patients. The percentage positivity of NTM for stool and sputum sample was 7.5 and 7.14 per cent respectively. MAC was isolated from stool in four cases and from sputum in two cases, while two isolates of *M. fortuitum* were obtained from stool and one unspiciated NTM was isolated from sputum sample. No NTM was isolated from HIV seronegative tuberculosis patients (stool n=40; sputum n=128).

In another study⁵, we had used BACTEC 13 A medium to culture 71 blood samples from an equal number of HIV seropositive patients. Of these, 67 were diagnosed as cases of either pulmonary or extrapulmonary tuberculosis. MAC was isolated from blood of three patients (4.23%) and *M. simiae* from another three (4.23%). *M. tuberculosis* was not isolated from any sample. The percentage positivity of NTM in these patients was 8.45 per cent. Blood cultures

of the 33 HIV seronegative tuberculosis patients were negative for both *M. tuberculosis* and NTM. The study from Chennai using BACTEC 13A medium, has reported *M. phlei* from blood of an HIV seropositive patient i.e., one among the 85 tested³.

We hope that these studies would generate interest in mycobacteriologists to undertake more studies in order to assess the exact status of NTM in the country and may have an impact in later years towards the control of tuberculosis.

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