

Circulation
Participants

MRC WORKING PARTY ON AIDS

Minutes of the meeting held at 20 Park Crescent, London W1N 4AL on Tuesday,
17 April 1984

Present:

Members:

Dr D A J Tyrrell (Chairman)
Dr A J Pinching (Secretary)
Professor M W Adler
Professor A L Bloom
Dr N S Galbraith
Dr J G P Sissons
Dr D Taylor-Robinson
Dr R S Tedder
Dr A D B Webster

Departmental Observers:

Dr R G Covell (SHHD)
Dr Alison Smithies (DHSS)

MRC Office Staff:

Dr Katherine Levy
Dr M J Fisher
Dr Jane Cope
Mr K Hammond

Apologies for absence:

Dr J R W Harris
Professor P J Lachmann
Professor H P Lambert
Professor K Murray
Dr W M Prentice (replaced by Dr Covell)
Dr R Weiss

1. Chairman's Introduction

The Chairman welcomed Dr Galbraith, who was taking up his place on the Working Party, and took the opportunity to express appreciation of Dr Palmer's work on the Working Party in Dr Galbraith's absence. He noted that Dr Tedder had become a full member of the Working Party, and expressed regret about Professor Lambert's recent illness.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 December 1984

These were agreed to be an accurate record.

3. Matters arising from the Minutes

(i) Minute 3

Following the discussion at the last meeting, it had been agreed that individual Working Party members would act as referees for specific applications, rather than the Working Party trying to express a corporate view. Applications were still being circulated to members for information and any informal comment they wished to make. As members still felt uneasy about receiving copies of applications in this way, it was suggested that the Chairman and/or Deputy Chairman only should see the full papers in order to judge whether the proposed studies were within the area of work which the Working Party wished to foster. Members would receive only the abstract and "purpose of investigation", in unattributed form, and would also be informed as to the outcome of such applications.

(ii) Minute 6

The Chairman reported that the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens had had further discussions on the safety requirements for AIDS work and had referred the tentative guidelines to a smaller Working Group. He thought that new guidelines would not now be available until late summer at the earliest.

4. Report of the Working Party

The report had been noted by the Systems Board, and comments would be relayed in due course. It was noted that there would be some need to keep recommendations up to date, probably on an annual basis. This would be considered further in the Autumn of 1984.

5. EEC Meetings on AIDS

The Chairman and Deputy Chairman reported on three meetings held under the auspices of the EEC to examine possibilities for research in Europe. These had been prompted by the European Parliament, and proposals would be considered by the European Research Committee (CRM). A number of possible collaborative research ventures were discussed, and two potential areas for

action were focussed upon. One would involve collaborative ventures between different countries, and would include studies dependent upon arranging to test materials derived from many countries, perhaps by exchanging staff, reagents or test samples - for example, studies on primates. In the second case, direct funding would be needed for certain defined projects such as perhaps, clinical trials. The CRM accepted the broad suggestions, but found the proposed package too expensive. At the final meeting it was agreed that funding for basic research at the national level would not be carried out under EEC auspices: EEC funds were not to be used simply for 'topping up' of national funding. It was thought more appropriate to encourage coordinated action, to enable the exchange of material and research workers between laboratories in the community. It was felt that the EEC should not attempt to compete with the United States research effort but should engage in studies related to the particular features of AIDS in Europe, for example studies on patients with African connections. It was agreed that the MRC office staff would determine how funds might be obtained from the CRM for collaborative work of the type envisaged by the EEC.

There was also discussion of the planned central clearing house for epidemiological and possibly other information, that had been proposed by the WHO and EEC. It was hoped that further information would be available once the initial organisation had been established.

6. WHO and IUIS AIDS Working Group Meeting.

Dr Pinching reported the successful drafting by this group of a position paper, which was shortly to be published in an international medical journal. Of particular interest to the Working Party was a rather wider definition of AIDS based on immunological features and pathogenic mechanisms.

Dr Pinching also referred to two other pieces of information which had come to light during the course of his visit. Studies on primates which had been conducted at the Centres for Disease Control had been rather limited, contrary to information available earlier. It was agreed that Dr Taylor-Robinson would check what experiments had been conducted by CDC, NIH and other groups in order to focus further primate work more effectively.

The other item concerned the data from Dr Montagnier of the Pasteur Institute which was presented at a meeting in March. Evidence, on the basis of virus isolation and serological tests, that a lymphotropic retrovirus played a causative role in AIDS was outlined. A number of implications of this work were considered, including the need for caution in immunostimulation during early stages of AIDS, such as persistent lymphadenopathy, which could potentially enhance the expression of the virus and hence of immunodeficiency resulting from it. On the other hand it was recognised that alpha interferon or other antiviral agents applied early might be helpful. It was agreed that there was a need to establish the sero-epidemiology and natural history of infection with this agent, and to confirm the work.

7. AIDS Information Group discussion on contact tracing

Dr Pinching reported on a meeting to consider the scientific and ethical aspects of contact tracing that was held by the AIDS Information Group. He summarised the conclusions of the meeting that the scientific benefits of such general contact tracing would be limited. The ethical and moral problems arising from informing people that they had possibly been infected by an agent for which there were neither test nor treatment were considered to outweigh possible benefits. It was appreciated that the situation could change as tests improved and understanding increased. The particular issue of contact tracing of blood donations from AIDS patients was also discussed.

8. MRC Press Briefing on AIDS

The objectives of the MRC press briefing on AIDS which was to follow the meeting in the afternoon were outlined and specific questions were allocated to certain speakers.

9. Applications for project grant support

General comments were made on the circulated applications for project grant support. Neuropsychological function in AIDS (Green and Pinching) was considered appropriate to the MRC Working Party's broad recommendations for research. The second application on attitudes in men at risk of AIDS (Green and Pinching) was thought perhaps more appropriate for DHSS support.

It was noted that there would be some overlap between the two studies. Because both of these applications had been submitted simultaneously to the DHSS it was asked how the assessment by the Neurosciences Board would affect the DHSS decisions on these applications. Dr Levy indicated that MRC liaise with DHSS over any applications of interest to both, to decide which body should assess them. Projects which were declined by the MRC on scientific grounds would not then be taken up by DHSS. The third study on AIDS and lymphadenopathy (Zuckerman, Murray-Lyon and Gazzard) was briefly considered. The overlap with other studies, the relevance of the preliminary electron microscopic findings and the ethics and the need for controls in the therapeutic sections were discussed.

10. Minutes of the CBLA Working Group

These were noted. The point was raised that the CBLA itself had no funds, but needed to seek scientific solutions to rather pragmatic questions, such as those of surrogate tests. The Working Party considered how such projects should be handled, and it was thought quite appropriate that applications should be submitted in the normal way to the MRC and/or DHSS.

11. Any other business

Two further applications had been received from Galbraith and McEvoy (CDSC) and Polakoff (Epidemiological Research Laboratory PHLs, Colindale) and were tabled. It was agreed that members had not had time to consider them in detail, but that they should send any comments on these projects as soon as possible to the MRC office.

12. Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the Working Party should meet again in the Autumn; dates would be circulated in due course.

GRO-C