

Dear Colleagues,

1. -From our own correspondent- in West Africa

Mali

Antenna Technologies, a Swiss NGO based in Geneva, in collaboration with the Department of Traditional Medicine of the Ministry of Health in Bamako, has run an observational clinical cohort study of a local herbal antimalarial for the treatment of malaria in the village of Missidoukou, in the region of Sikasso, eastern Mali. The work was funded by the Swiss government, and closely followed RITAM guidelines. The remedy was selected following ethnobotanical surveys, retrospective clinical studies, and *in vitro* studies of selected plants. 84 patients have been included in the trial, the majority of them children. Follow-up of patients will finish at the end of this month, and results will then be analysed. We hope to have some interesting results to present at the meetings in Marseilles and Yaounde.

Burkina Faso

I was lucky to be able to hop across the border from Mali to visit RITAM members Halidou Tinto and Maminata Traoré, based at Centre Muraz in Bobo-Dioulasso. Dr Tinto is a pharmacologist and molecular biologist with a keen interest in drug resistance, and runs the drug resistance surveillance programme for his country. Dr Traoré is a phytochemist, who has been screening local antimalarial plants and isolating their active ingredients. Their centre is very well equipped to conduct *in vitro* and *in vivo* testing of plant extracts for antimalarial activity, and they have kindly offered to screen extracts for other RITAM members in West Africa, and also to train other RITAM members in the relevant techniques. At the moment the WHO/TDR screening centre in West Africa is based in Nigeria, which may not be very accessible for members from Francophone countries. RITAM could apply for - Research Capability Strengthening- funds for such collaborations. Please contact me if you are interested.

Ghana

From Burkina Faso I travelled on to Ghana, where I visited Prof Oppong-Boachie and colleagues at the Faculty of Pharmacy at Kumasi University (KNUST), Dr Achibald Sittie and colleagues at the Centre for Scientific Research into Plant Medicine (CSRPM) in Mampong-Akuapim, near Accra, and Prof Marian Addy at the Department of Biochemistry of the University of Ghana in Accra.

CSRPM has been established since 1975, and has a very impressive set-up. There is a clinic which receives about 200 patients a day, who are seen by medical doctors, and then are prescribed herbal preparations where appropriate. The Centre makes a wide variety of herbal preparations, including a decoction of *Cryptolepis sanguinolenta*, which it has found to be clinically effective for the treatment of malaria in preliminary trials. More extensive trials are being planned. The centre also has pharmacology and phytochemistry laboratories.

Prof Addy in Accra has helped to set up a new network called the - Western Africa Network of Natural Products Research Scientists- (WANNPRES). Their first scientific meeting was held this August in Accra, and focussed on -Harmonising Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge Systems for the Management of Malaria and HIV/AIDS-. A report is being prepared from the meeting, which the organisers are hoping to publish. It is hoped that RITAM and WANNPRES will be able to collaborate in the future in advancing research into herbal antimalarials in West Africa. Prof Addy is also involved in clinical trials of a teabag formulation of *Cryptolepis sanguinolenta*, which are being carried out at the Noguchi Memorial Institute in Accra.

2. Report from the MR4 / ICBG workshop on screening and preclinical development of antimalarials (October 12-13, Bethesda, USA)

The workshop brought together experts on malaria drug development to address issues critical for successful implementation of natural product screening programs. The participants were investigators involved in International Cooperative Biodiversity Groups (ICBG). ICBG runs programs to combine conservation of biodiversity with drug discovery

and economic development

(<http://www.fic.nih.gov/programs/icbg.html>).

There were many useful presentations, from MMV, Walter Reed, NIH, NCCAM, MR4, and others. Topics ranged from large-scale high throughput screening, to -reverse pharmacology-. This concept was proposed by Dr Ashok Vaidya, Director of -Bharvans SPARC- (Swami Prakashananda Ayurveda Research Centre), based in Mumbai, India. Dr Vaidya advocated the approach of -fast-tracking- of traditional medicines by starting with clinical trials, rather than extensive pre-clinical research as done in conventional pharmacology. His centre has conducted a number of clinical trials on herbal antimalarials, including a formulation called -Sudarshan Ghanavati-, whose major ingredient is Swertia chirata. He emphasised the importance of investigating complete formulae rather than screening individual plant species. He drew an analogy with the concept of -anti-disease vaccines-, suggesting that herbal medicine could function as -anti-disease therapy-, enhancing the immune response against malaria rather than focusing on rapid and complete parasite clearance, which may impede the development of natural immunity.

Merlin Willcox spoke about RITAM's systematic reviews of clinical studies, and the guidelines developed by the clinical group. There followed interesting discussions on controversial issues, for example whether screening should be conducted on a random basis, or according to ethnopharmacological information.

3. Future Meetings of Interest

A. 20TH ANNUAL JOINT SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE AND SILVER JUBILEE ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH (NIMR),

TANZANIA The 20th Annual Joint Scientific Conference (AJSC) and the NIMR Silver Jubilee Anniversary will be held at the Arusha International Conference Centre in Arusha, northern Tanzania. The conference opens on Monday, February 21, 2005 at 09:00h and closes on Thursday, February 24, 2005 at 17.30h. The Conference will also

organize a Symposium on Current Health Research and Innovative Interventions: Reflections of the Twenty-five Years of Health Research in Tanzania.

Conference themes and sub-themes The theme for the 20th AJSC is: "The burden of diseases in poor resource countries: meeting the challenges of combating HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria". The timeline will include plenary sessions of state of the art presentations on various sub-themes followed by parallel sessions that will receive and discuss free communications. Suitable presentations will be peer reviewed for publication as proceedings. This year, important plenary and parallel sessions are devoted to the following sub-themes: - Human Immuno-deficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome - Malaria and neglected and emerging diseases - Tuberculosis - Traditional Medicine and Practices: Potential opportunities - Disease Surveillance and Health Information Systems - Health Systems and Policy Research - Health Education and its Promotion - Nutrition Essential to Sound Health - Ethics in health research in developing countries. **Abstracts** Abstracts are invited on the above sub-themes. Abstracts must be submitted electronically by November 30th 2004. Each abstract must not exceed 250 words and where applicable should include the objectives, methodology, results and conclusions. Each abstract should show the surnames and initials of the authors. Names of those who will make the presentations should be underlined. Authors are requested to indicate clearly, whether the abstract is for oral or poster presentation. Each oral presentation including discussion time must not exceed 20 minutes. The conference will provide projection facilities for transparencies and power point.

Other useful information Other useful information about Exhibitions, Tourism, Travel and Accommodation, Registration fee, Application forms, and how to send the abstract electronically can be found at the following

website: <http://www.nimr.or.tz/Pages/Activities.html>

Contact address: Secretariat, Annual Joint Scientific Conference, National Institute for Medical Research, P.O. Box 9653, Dar es Salaam,

Tanzania Tel: +255 =9622-2121400; Fax: +255-22-2121360 /
2121380 Email: ajsc@nimr.or.tz Website: www.nimr.or.tz

B. 18th Symposium on Brazilian Medicinal Plants, 16-19 November 2004, Manaus, Brazil.

This national symposium (in Portuguese) is being held in the capital of Amazonas state, Brazil. See www.simposioplantasmecicinas.com.br

C. Medicine and Health in the Tropics, Marseille, France, 11-15 Sept 2005

There will be a special symposium on -Natural anti-parasitic agents-, chaired by Dr Gerry Bodeker (RITAM Chair) and Dr Milijaona (Institut Pasteur de Madagascar). Dr Ben Gilbert from Fiocruz, Brazil, has agreed to be the keynote speaker. RITAM members are invited to submit abstracts for consideration in this symposium.

Further information on the conference is on the website at www.iftm-pharo2005.org

D. Fourth MIM Pan-African Malaria conference, Yaounde-©, Cameroon. 13-18 November 2005. (see www.mim.su.se/conference2005)

4. Recent Publications of Interest

The following are recent publications by RITAM

members: V.K. Dua, V.P. Ojha, R. Roy, B.C. Joshi, N. Valecha, C.U. Devi, M.C. Bhatnagar, V.P. Sharma, S.K. Subbarao (2004). Anti-malarial activity of some xanthenes isolated from the roots of *Andrographis paniculata*. *J Ethnopharm* 95(2-3): 247-251

Pohlit AM, Quignard ELJ, Nunomura SM et al (2004). Screening of plants found in Amazonas State, Brazil for activity against *Aedes aegypti* larvae. *Acta Amazonica* 34(1): 97 - 105. Willcox ML, Bodeker G (2004). Traditional Herbal Medicines for Malaria. *British Medical Journal* 329

(7475): 1156-9. Available free online at:

<http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/full/329/7475/1156> Willcox

ML, Rasoanaivo P, Sharma VP, Bodeker G (2004). Comment on: Randomised controlled Trial of a traditional preparation of *Artemisia annua* L. (Annual Wormwood) in the treatment of malaria. *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 98 (12): 755-6. **The following are other recent publications of interest:** R.K. Cimanga, L. Tona, N. Luyindula, K. Mesia, M. Lusakibanza, C.T. Musuamba, S. Apers, T.D. Bruyne, S.V. Miert, N. Hermans, J. Totte, L. Pieters, A.J. Vlietinck (2004). In vitro antiplasmodial activity of callus culture extracts and fractions from fresh apical stems of *Phyllanthus niruri* L. (Euphorbiaceae): part 2. *J Ethnopharm* 95(2-3): 399-404.

T.A. Bischoff, C.J. Kelley, Y. Karchesy, M. Laurantos, P. Nguyen-Dinh, A.G. Arefi (2004). Antimalarial activity of Lactucin and Lactucopicrin: sesquiterpene lactones isolated from *Cichorium intybus* L. [rapid communication] *J Ethnopharm* 95(2-3): 455-457. Fidock DA, Rosenthal PJ, Croft SL, Brun R, Nwaka S (2004). Antimalarial drug discovery: Efficacy models for compound screening. *Nature Reviews Drug Discovery*. 3: 509-520. Patwardhan B, Vaidya ADB, Chorghade M (2004). Ayurveda and natural products discovery. *Current Science* 86(6): 789-799. M. Waka, R.J. Hopkins, C. Curtis (2004). Ethnobotanical survey and testing of plants traditionally used against hematophagous insects in Eritrea. *J Ethnopharmacol* 95(1): 95-101

PUBLICATION OF A NEW AFRICAN JOURNAL

African Journal of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicines Volume 1, No. 1, October 2004.

<http://www.africanethnomedicines.net/current%20issue.php>

The African Journal of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative medicines (AJTCAM), a new broad-based journal, is founded on two key tenets: To publish exciting research in all areas of applied medicinal plants, Traditional medicines, Complementary Alternative Medicines, food and agricultural technologies, and promotion of healthy use of medicinal products. Secondly, to provide the most rapid turn-around time possible for reviewing and publishing, and to disseminate the

articles freely for teaching and reference purposes. All articles published in AJE are peer-reviewed.

The African Journal of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative medicines will be published thrice year, and will be online. AJTCAM is published by <http://www.africanethnomedicines.net>, an independent network committed to ensuring peer-reviewed ethnomedicinal works and is permanently available online without charge or any other barriers to access.

METHODS IN MALARIA RESEARCH PROTOCOL BOOK

The 4th edition of the much-appreciated Methods in Malaria Research Protocol book is now available online at:

http://www.malaria.mr4.org/MR4_Protocols_4th.html

You will find new chapters (animal models, mosquitoes), ten new sections including 30 new protocols. The fourth edition is edited by Inger Ljungström, Hedvig Perlmann, Martha Schlichtherle, Arthur Scherf and Mats Wahlgren

THE INTOLERABLE BURDEN OF MALARIA II

Malaria research scientists from around the globe have published new insights into the international burden of malaria and what can be done about it. The new data are presented in a supplement to the American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene titled -The Intolerable Burden of Malaria II: What's new, What's needed, released on September 9, 2004.

Full text of the journal supplement can be accessed by visiting:
http://www.ajtmh.org/content/vol71/2_suppl/index.shtml.

Researchers interested in receiving a hard copy of the journal supplement or the associated DVD should contact the FIC Communications Office at ficinfo@nih.gov or (301) 496-2075.

5. New members

We welcome the following new members who have joined since the last newsletter:

Prof. J. Plaizier-Vercammen, Head of the Department of Pharmaceutical Technology, Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Doing research on *Artemisia annua* teas.

Robert Steele, PhD candidate in alternative medicine focusing on herbal and homeopathic treatment of malaria.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Merlin Willcox (Secretary, RITAM)