TAENIA SOLIUM CYSTICERCOSIS: THE ASIAN AND AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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Cysticercosis, caused by the pork tapeworm *Taenia solium*, long a relatively neglected foodborne parasitic zoonosis, is receiving increasing attention as its global impact on health and agriculture becomes better understood. It has been estimated that over 50 million people are affected worldwide. However, this estimate is probably most accurate for Latin America, where for several decades concerted research and control efforts have been conducted. More attention is now being given to the cysticercosis situation in Subsaharan Africa, spurred, perhaps by the recognition in campaigns against epilepsy that neurocysticercosis is an important factor in that affliction. Concern is also being raised in that region in connection with the recent rapid increase in smallholder pig rearing, under conditions that may favor the transmission of *T. solium.* The demand for increased production of animal protein as well as household income makes intervention and control urgent.

In Asia, cysticercosis has been recognized for several hundred years, but for reasons not clear, it has been a truly neglected zoonosis. This may be in large part due to poor information on the scope and severity of the zoonosis, and to the general inaccessibility of data that have been gathered. The genesis of this symposium was to present information on the status of cysticercosis in India, where the prevalence of the parasite has recently been revealed to be unexpectedly high, and where the clinical manifestation of neurological involvement appears to be unique in comparison with that reported in Latin America. A project funded by the Danish International Development Agency (Danida) in India has produced new information and progress in the immunodiagnosis of single cyst granulomas due to *T. solium.* It was decided to organize a larger symposium to both present these data, and to increase the awareness of the zoonosis throughout the Asia region. Because of the many similarities between the two regions, investigators working in Africa have been invited to present overviews of the situation in Africa and to discuss the approaches being developed there for surveillance, prevention, and control of *T. solium* infections. An important action taken in the Eastern and Southern Africa region is the formation of a multinational, multisectoral working group to coordinate research and control activities. The potential value of this for Asian researchers will be discussed. Also included in this symposium will be a presentation on the vital need to gather socioeconomic impact data necessary for national and international assistance priority setting. The outcome of the symposium is expected to be, in addition to increased awareness, recommendations for further actions in Asia to assess the burden of cysticercosis and establish mechanisms for collective decision making with regard to research and control needs and strategies.

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