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CLASSIFICATION AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE
AETIOLOGICAL AGENTS OF PRIMARY AMEBIC MENINGO-ENCEPHALITIS
TOGETHER WITH PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATIONS
OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES

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ABSTRACT

The taxonomy of the aetiological agents of primary Amebic Meningo-encephalitis (PAM) was investigated to determine the reliability of the common features of the three current schemes. It is concluded that the scheme of Singh & Das (1970) is the most suitable and should be generally adopted. The acceptance of one scheme will remove much of the confusion which characterizes the classification of these organisms.

Current identification methods that differentiate between Naegleria gruberi (the non-pathogen) and Naegleria fowleri (the pathogen) were also investigated over a wider range of parameters than previously, to establish their relative usefulness. The conclusions of this investigation are presented in Tables XXII and XXIII. The controversial identification of the 1968 New Zealand cases (isolates BH & BL) as a Myxomycete by Mandal et al. (1970) was re-examined. Evidence is presented to demonstrate that they are N. gruberi.

It was established that there was no general selection for the non-pathogen over the pathogen at 37°C as indicated by their respective Q_{O_2} values at 27°C and 37°C. That there is potential for adaptation to a range of temperatures was shown.

The failure of chlorine as a disinfectant for these soil-amebae was also examined. The ineffectiveness of normal levels of chlorination was confirmed and therefore the use of NaCl and the basic dyes Malachite Green and Brilliant Green investigated. It was found that no amebae could survive a concentration of 1.5% (W/V) of NaCl in axenic culture, of 1.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{cm}^3$ of Malachite Green and of 3.0 μg of Brilliant Green.

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PREFACE

Primary Amebic Meningo-encephalitis (PAM) is a normally fatal disease of the central nervous system (CNS) usually involving young, healthy individuals with a recent history of contact with fresh-water. It was first recognised by Fowler in Australia in January 1961 and since then, about 74 diagnosed cases have occurred in various parts of the world (Table I).

On purely histological evidence, all reported cases of PAM, prior to 1968 were attributed to members of the *Hartmannella/Acanthamoeba* group of amoebae (Culbertson et al., 1961; Fowler & Carter, 1965). However, three reports in 1968 (Cerva & Novak; Cerva, Novak & Culbertson; Carter) suggested that the amoebae were much smaller in histological sections than for the formerly known pathogenic *Hartmannella/Acanthamoeba* strains, and probably belonged to the related genus *Naegleria*. Cultural verification of this suggestion soon followed (Butt, Baro & Knorr, 1968; Culbertson, Ensminger & Overton, 1968; Calicott et al., 1968) and the amoebae were subsequently classified as *Naegleria gruberi*. Then, in 1970, on the basis of morphological, cultural, and pathogenicity differences, Carter renamed the pathogenic *Naegleria*, *Naegleria fowleri*. To date, there are two other synonyms for the pathogenic *Naegleria*: *N. aerobia* (Singh & Das, 1970) and *N. invades* (Chang, 1971).

The first New Zealand cases of PAM occurred in the late autumn of 1968 (Mandal et al., 1970) after the victims had bathed in a Matamata hot-spring. Although the amoebae were originally considered to belong to the genus *Naegleria*, they were later reclassified as a slime mould probably belonging to the genus *Echinostelium*, Mandal et al. The fifth case occurred in May 1972, after the victim had also swum in a thermal pool, but in this case the aetiological agent was identified as *N. fowleri* (Nicoll, 1973). Since then the Adelaide Amebic Research Unit has consistently isolated pathogenic *Naegleria* and *Hartmannella/Acanthamoebae* from New Zealand sources (Robinson, 1974).

Unfortunately, the classification of these organisms is still a controversial matter (Carter, 1970; Culbertson, 1971). With three different classification schemes existing in the literature (Page, 1967; Singh & Das, 1970; Chang, 1971) all of which overlap to some consider-

able extent creating confusion in the selection of a name, it was considered necessary to review the classification to establish the degree of reliability which could be attached to each of the characters cited. It is essential as a prelude to the diagnosis of PAM that there are reliable characters on which to base an identification, since by its very nature, identification presupposes that classification has already distinguished the species, and that names have been assigned to them. As a follow-up, it was considered essential to review current identification methods over a wider range of experimental parameters than have previously been examined, as well as investigating new methods of identification. Using these methods, it was then decided to reassess the controversial identification by Mandal et al. (1970) of the causative agents of the early New Zealand cases.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT.. .. .	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.. .. .	iii
PREFACE	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF PLATES	xi
<u>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</u>	1
1. The History of Primary Amebic Meningo-encephalitis	1
1.1 Discovery	1
1.2 Classification and Identification	2
1.3 Epidemiology	6
1.4 Pathogenicity	8
1.5 Diagnosis	11
1.6 Treatment	12
2. Control Measures	15
3. Aims of the Investigation	16
<u>CHAPTER TWO: MATERIALS</u>	17
1. Ameba Cultures Used	17
2. Plate Media	21
3. Axenic Media	23
4. Cell Culture Media	26
4.1 Vero Cell Culture	26
4.2 Chick Embryo Kidney Cell Culture	26
5. Miscellaneous Solutions	28
<u>CHAPTER THREE: METHODS</u>	29
1. Sterilization	29
2. Culture Techniques	30
2.1 Cloning.. .. .	30
2.2 Axenizing	30
2.3 Flagellation	30
3. Serology.. .. .	31
3.1 Preparation of Antigens.. .. .	31

	<u>Page</u>
3.2 Preparation of Antisera.. .. .	32
3.3 Agglutination	32
3.4 Indirect Fluorescent Antibody	32
3.5 Gel-Diffusion (Ouchterlony).. .. .	33
4. Mouse Pathogenicity	34
5. Cell Culture.. .. .	35
5.1 Vero	35
5.2 Chick Embryo Kidney.. .. .	35
6. Disinfection.. .. .	37
6.1 Disinfection Tests	37
6.2 Effect of Different Cell Numbers on the Chlorination Level	37
6.3 Effect of a Maintained Chlorination Level on a Known Concentration of Amebae.. .. .	37
6.4 Analysis of Chlorine	37
7. Staining.. .. .	38
7.1 The Feulgen Reaction	38
7.2 Iron-Haematoxylin	38
7.3 Trichome	38
 <u>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS</u>	 39
1. Classification and Identification of Naegleria and Hartmann- ella/Acanthamoeba Isolates	39
1.1 Nuclear Division	39
1.2 Plaque Morphology	43
1.3 Diagnostic Physiological Characters.. .. .	47
1.4 Serology	48
1.4.1 Agglutination	48
1.4.2 Indirect Fluorescent Antibody Titres.. .. .	49
1.4.3 Gel-Diffusion Analysis (Ouchterlony).. .. .	51
1.5 Mouse Pathogenicity.. .. .	53
1.6 Vero Cell Culture	54
2. Respiration Rate (Q_{O_2}) and the Temperature Coefficient of Respiration (Q_{10})	59
3. Disinfection.. .. .	61
3.1 Use of NaCl.. .. .	61
3.1.1 In Monoxenic Culture.. .. .	62

	<u>Page</u>
3.1.2 In Axenic Culture	62
3.2 Basic Dyes.. .. .	64
3.2.1 Malachite Green.. .. .	64
3.2.2 Brilliant Green.. .. .	66
3.3 Chlorine	69
3.3.1 Effect of Different Cell Numbers on the Chlorination Level.. .. .	69
3.3.2 Effect of a Maintained Chlorination Level	69
<u>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION</u>	72
1. Classification of Families of Amebae Associated with Primary Amebic Meningo-encephalitis (PAM)	72
2. Identification of the Aetiological Agents of Primary Amebic Meningo-encephalitis	77
2.1 Identification Based on Morphology.. .. .	77
2.1.1 The Trophozoite Stage	77
2.1.2 The Flagellate Stage	80
2.1.3 The Cyst Stage	80
2.2 Growth and Physiology	81
2.2.1 Plaque Morphology	81
2.2.2 Salt Tolerance	82
2.2.3 Temperature.. .. .	82
2.2.4 Respiration Rate (Q_{O_2}) and the Temperature Co-efficient of Respiration (Q_{10})	84
2.3 Serology	85
2.4 Pathogenicity	88
3. Classification and Identification of the Waikato Isolates BH and BL of 1968	90
4. Disinfection	92
4.1 The Failure of Chlorine as a Disinfectant	92
4.2 The Use of NaCl and the Basic Dyes Malachite Green and Brilliant Green as Potential Disinfectants for the Control of Primary Amebic Meningo-encephalitis.. .. .	94
5. Conclusions.. .. .	97
BIBLIOGRAPHY	99

LIST OF FIGURES

	<u>Page</u>
1.	Schematic diagram of olfactory mucosa and adjacent structures 9
2. - 14.	Promitosis of <i>Naegleria</i> 41
15. - 27.	Mitosis of Hartmannellidae 42
28. - 33.	Comparative gel-diffusion analysis 52
34.	Q_{O_2} values at 27°C 60
35.	Q_{O_2} values at 37°C 60
36.	Percentage kill of <i>Naegleria</i> species due to NaCl in axenic culture 63
37.	Percentage kill of <i>Naegleria</i> species due to Malachite Green 67
38.	Percentage kill of <i>Naegleria</i> species due to Brilliant Green 67
39.	Effect of different cell numbers on the total available chlorine level as a consequence of time.. .. . 68
40.	Maintained chlorine level on 10^5 <i>Naegleria/cm^3</i> as a function of time.. .. . 70

LIST OF TABLES

	<u>Page</u>
I. Cases of PAM in the Literature	3
II. Current Classification Schemes	5
III. Comparison of Amphotericin B and Clotrimazole <u>in vitro</u> ..	13
IV. Ameba Cultures Used.. .. .	17
V. Immunization Schedule	31
VI. Comparison of Nuclear Division	39
VII. Comparison of Plaque Characteristics	43
VIII. Differential Diagnostic Characters of Naegleria.. .. .	47
IX. Agglutination Titres	48
X. IWAB Titres.. .. .	50
XI. Mouse-Pathogenicity Results.. .. .	53
XII. Pathogenicity in Vero Cell Culture	55
XIII. Q_{O_2} and Q_{10} Values of Naegleria.. .. .	59
XIV. Tolerance to NaCl Incorporated into Agar	61
XV. Tolerance of NaCl in Axenic Culture.. .. .	64
XVI. The Effectiveness of Malachite Green as a Disinfectant ..	65
XVII. The Effectiveness of Brilliant Green as a Disinfectant ..	66
XVIII. The Total Available Chlorine Level as a Consequence of Different Cell Numbers	69
XIX. Comparative Constituent Chlorine Levels on a Known Con- centration of Amebae	71
XX. Morphological Comparison Between <u>N. gruberi</u> and <u>N.</u> <u>fowleri</u>	78
XXI. Comparative Immunoelectrophoretic Analysis of Different Genera of Amebae	87
XXII. Absolute Features Used in the Differentiation of <u>N.</u> <u>gruberi</u> from <u>N. fowleri</u>	98
XXIII. Supporting Features Used in the Differentiation of <u>N.</u> <u>gruberi</u> from <u>N. fowleri</u>	98

LIST OF PLATES

	<u>Page</u>
1. Trophozoite stage of <u>N. gruberi</u> , Ng-27.. .. .	18
2. Cyst stage of <u>N. gruberi</u> , Ng-27	18
3. Trophozoite stage of <u>N. fowleri</u> , NHI	19
4. Trophozoite stage of BL	20
5. Trophozoite stage of BH	20
6. Plaque morphology of <u>N. gruberi</u> , Ng-27 grown on NM agar with <u>E. coli</u>	44
7. Plaque morphology of <u>N. fowleri</u> , NHI grown on NM agar with <u>E. coli</u>	45
8. Centred-plaque morphology of <u>N. fowleri</u> , NHI grown on NM agar with <u>E. cloacae</u>	45
9. Plaque morphology of <u>N. fowleri</u> , PA14 grown on NM agar with <u>E. cloacae</u>	46
10. 3 day normal Vero cell culture monolayer	56
11. 3 day cytopathic effects of <u>N. fowleri</u> , HB-1 in Vero cell culture	56
12. & 3 day cytopathic effects of <u>N. fowleri</u> , NTH in Vero cell 13. culture/stain trichome.. .. .	57