

Preliminary Report of Identification of Scrub typhus in Jaffna

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Typhus fevers are major causes of febrile illness throughout the world including the Asia-Pacific region. Typhus like fevers is being increasingly reported from different parts of Sri Lanka. During the last two years a high number of admissions due to such fevers are becoming of major public health concern in Teaching hospital, Jaffna. This study was performed in ward 7, Teaching hospital, Jaffna. All patients presenting to the ward 7 of the hospital with fever eschar, with or without rash were included in this study.

46 patients were admitted to the study from December 2004 to November 2005. A pretested questionnaire was used to obtain demographic and clinical data. 3ml of blood was taken in a sterile dry screw capped bottle from nine of the 46 patients as soon as possible after admission and prior to starting antibiotic treatment. Serum was separated and samples were placed in a transport box with ice-packs and transported the same day to the laboratory, Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya through a personal carrier. The nine samples were tested by scrub typhus ELISA (IgM & IgG). Also two of the scrub typhus sera were tested by genus specific PCR for spotted fever group rickettsiae.

A seasonal variation was noted with increased admissions from December to March. The majority of patients (76.1%) were 15-30 years. 88% of the patients were male. The duration of fever on presentation to the hospital ranged from 2-13 days with a mean of 6.31 SD. 2.6. Fever at onset of the illness and eschar was present in all patients. None of the patients had a macular-papular rash. Scrub typhus IgM was positive in all nine patients & IgG was positive in seven patients. PCR for spotted fever was negative in the two patients tested.

Typhus like fevers presenting at Teaching Hospital, Jaffna are due to scrub typhus. Further studies to elucidate epidemiology and risk factors will be helpful to plan preventive measures.

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