ANTISEMITISM AND MYASTHENIA GRAVIS

To the Editor:

With regard to the articles by Freedman [1] and Strous [2], neither mentioned my article on Dr. Lazar Remen, who in 1932 pioneered prostigmin treatment for myasthenia gravis [3]. I met his son Dany Remen and his daughter Yona Laor, who presented me with the family archives including all of Remen's publications. The hospital he established was bought by The Workers Compensation Sick Fund (Kupat Holim Clalit), which was later named the Hasharon Municipal General Hospital. Remen was very active in the community and continued to work as a gynecologist in his private clinic until his death. I would have expected that Remen's historical article [4], at least, would be cited in the *IMAJ* articles.

Dr. Henry R. Viets, neurologist and medical historian, made huge efforts to trace Remen, eventually finding him in Israel in the early 1960s. In July 1964 he wrote to Remen: "If I read your paper correctly, the director of the nerve clinic was more interested at that time in the glycin, and you and he followed that unprofitable pattern, either missing or misinterpreting the results of prostigmin." At the third international symposium on myasthenia gravis that took place at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York in February 1965, Dr. Viets was asked to give the opening remarks. Viets invited Remen to the meeting in order to honor him and publicly acknowledge his contribution.

In Freedman's article the eminent Jewish Polish neurologist Edward Flatau is erroneously called Henryk. Freedman also noted Goldflam's clinic address as Granicza street; it should be ul. Graniczna ("Border street").

Concerning Dr. "Walter" Feldberg, I found many articles on *Wilhelm* Feldberg. Professor Wilhelm Siegmund Feldberg was forced to leave Germany in 1933 and was invited by Sir Henry Dale to the National Institute for Medical Research, London, where he became Head of the Division of Physiology and Pharmacology. His results were fundamental to establishing acetylcholine as a neurotransmitter. In 1961 Feldberg used German restitution money and his pension as Emeritus Professor in Germany to establish the Feldberg Foundation. Several other notable personalities should be remembered: Johann Ignaz Hoppe, the Swiss physiologist, who described myasthenia gravis pseudoparalytica in 1892; Heinrich Erb, a non-Jewish German neurologist (myasthenia gravis was called Erb-Goldflam-Oppenheim disease at the time) who added clinical data in 1878; and Carl Weigert, a German-Jewish pathologist who in 1901 reported the association between hypertrophy of the thymus and myasthenia gravis.

I don't think Janusz Korczak founded the Orphanage, but left his position at the Jewish pediatric hospital to work as director/educator and doctor at the Crochmalna Street orphanage. The Association of Jewish Physicians and the Jewish Health Organization in Poland (which functioned from 1921 to 1942) has been the focus of our research for many years, including thorough research on Gershon Lewin, E. Flatau, L. Wulman, A. Soloweiczyk, and many others. The resulting article was accepted for publication by the Brandeis University journal *Polin – Studies in Polish Jewry*.

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References

1. Freedman S. Antisemitism and the history of myasthenia gravis. *IMAJ* 2010; 12: 195-8.
2. Strous RD. Antisemitism and the history of medicine: the challenge then and now. *IMAJ* 2010; 12: 229-30.
3. Ohry A. Dr Lazar (Eliezer) Remen: a forgotten pioneer in the treatment of myasthenia gravis. *J Med Biogr* 2009; 17: 73-74.
4. Remen L. Zur Pathogenese und Therapie der Myasthenia gravis pseudoparalytica. *Dtsch Z Nervenheilk* 1932; 128: 66-78.

Erratum
In the article "Clinical manifestations in Israeli cystinuria patients and molecular assessment of carrier rates in Libyan Jewish controls" by R. Sidi et al. [2003; 5(6): 439-42], the initial of the third author's name was written incorrectly: it should be Kreiss Y and not Kreiss I as printed.

Capsule

The X chromosome in immune functions

In response to various immune challenges, females show better survival than males; the X chromosome plays an important role in this immunologic advantage. X chromosome-linked diseases are usually restricted to males, who have only one copy of the X chromosome; however, females are more prone to autoimmune diseases, and the X chromosome may be involved in the breakdown of self-tolerance. Several hypotheses have been proposed in recent years that support a role for the X chromosome in shaping autoimmune responses. Libert and co-authors review the main mechanisms responsible for increased immune activity in females. This provides a survival advantage in the face of pathogenic insult but can also enhance the susceptibility of females to autoimmunity.

Nature Rev Immunol 2010; 10: 594
Eitan Israeli

Capsule

A new adipokine controls obesity in mice

Certain metabolic disorders, such as type 2 diabetes, are more prone to arise in obese individuals, a link that has been attributed, in part, to the detrimental activities of adipokines – proteins secreted by fat cells. Most adipokines disrupt glucose homeostasis by promoting inflammation and insulin resistance. Ouchi et al. identified a new adipokine, secreted frizzled-related protein 5 (Sfrp5), which has the opposite effect: it is anti-inflammatory and appears to promote metabolic health. In obese mice, Sfrp5 suppresses the activation of key inflammatory cells (macrophages) residing within adipose tissue by inhibiting the c-Jun N-terminal kinase (JNK) signaling pathway. Further study of this Sfrp5-JNK1 regulatory axis in fat may offer therapeutic opportunities for obesity-linked metabolic disorders.

Science 2010; 329: 454

Eitan Israeli

Capsule

DNA methylation site dictates its activity

The genome receives epigenetic marks throughout development that regulate the activity of multiple genes. One such mark is methylation, which usually represses gene transcription. Methylation has generally been studied in the promoters of genes, where many regulatory signals coordinate to control the expression of the gene. Studying neural stem cells from mice, Wu et al. show that DNA methylation can be a double-edged sword. Although methylation of DNA sequences in promoters tends to be repressive, methylation of DNA sequences beyond the promoters can actually promote gene expression. Analysis of the methyltransferase Dnmt3a in mouse neural stem cells revealed that methylations around neurogenic genes – but outside their promoters – maintained the activity of these genes.

Science 2010; 329: 444

Eitan Israeli

Capsule

Viruses in the fecal microbiota of monozygotic twins and their mothers

Viral diversity and life cycles are poorly understood in the human gut and other body habitats. Phages and their encoded functions may provide informative signatures of a human microbiota and of microbial community responses to various disturbances and may indicate whether community health or dysfunction is manifest after apparent recovery from a disease or therapeutic intervention. Reyes et al. report sequencing of the viromes (metagenomes) of virus-like particles isolated from fecal samples collected from healthy adult female monozygotic twins and their mothers at three time points over a one-year period. We compared these data sets with data sets of sequenced bacterial 16S ribosomal RNA genes and total fecal-community DNA. Co-twins and their mothers share a significantly greater degree of similarity in their fecal bacterial communities than do unrelated individuals. In contrast, viromes are unique to individuals regardless of their degree of genetic relatedness. Despite remarkable interpersonal variations in viromes and their encoded functions, intrapersonal diversity is very low, with › 95% of virotypes retained over the period surveyed, and with viromes dominated by a few temperate phages that exhibit remarkable genetic stability. These results indicate that a predatory viral-microbial dynamic, manifest in a number of other characterized environmental ecosystems, is notably absent in the very distal intestine.

Nature 2010; 466: 334

Eitan Israeli

"Conscience is a man's compass, and though the needle sometimes deviates, though one often perceives irregularities when directing one's course by it, one must still try to follow its direction"

Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), Dutch post-Impressionist painter whose work had a far-reaching influence on 20th century art for its vivid colors and emotional impact. He suffered from anxiety and increasingly frequent bouts of mental illness throughout his life, and died largely unknown, at the age of 37, from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Little appreciated during his lifetime, today he is widely regarded as one of history's greatest painters.