Letters to the Editor

Candida Infections

The paper by Stieritz, Law, and Holder (J. clin. Path., 1973, 26, 405-408) states that all Candida isolates from patients should be speciated. Isolation of Candida species representing colonization of skin and mucous membranes occurs daily in most clinical laboratories. It is our experience that less than 1% of these are associated with infection with this genus. Although isolation from blood and urine is more suggestive of infection, many of these prove to be transient or spurious.

Continued study of the relative pathogenicity and antimicrobial susceptibility of Candida species is desirable. This may be accomplished in the majority of hospitals by referring isolates, which are repeatedly isolated from patients with symptoms suggesting infection, to reference laboratories which maintain the skill and materials required for accurate speciation. Despite acknowledged differences in the pathogenicity of Candida species, all may produce fatal systemic infections. The decision to treat should be based on clinical evidence of infection, not the species isolated. It is academically satisfying to have speciation but it is not essential to diagnosis and treatment. Laboratory workers and those responsible for licensure and performance evaluation may infer from these authors’ remarks need and justification for new minimum laboratory standards. Increasing public reaction to rising health care costs dictates that we give greater attention to the cost benefit of arbitrary often academically inspired recommendations for increasingly expensive clinical microbiology.

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Klebsiella Species in Chest Infections

I read with interest Dr Fallon’s (J. Clin. Path., 26, 253) re-assessment of the significance of Klebsiella species in chest infections and note that he confirms the difference in this respect between K. aerogenes and other species.

May I make the following observations?

1. Now that digestion-dilution methods are widely employed to avoid deceptive false positive cultures in sputum bacteriology (Wilson and Martin, 1972), I doubt the wisdom of culturing centrifuged deposits of sputum, other than for fungal isolations. This will have the effect of concentrating small numbers of coliforms, which will overgrow the mixed normal flora but would have been clearly identified as of doubtful significance by routine techniques. Though it may be quibbling, in many instances it probably overemphasizes the importance of coliforms in sputum to talk of secondary invasion. Their invasive potential are nil in patients with normal host defense mechanisms. Secondary colonization is probably a truer assessment of their significance.

2. I think that 10 years on one cannot longer recommend a return to eponymous titles such as Friedlander’s bacillus. Perhaps a satisfactory compromise will be the term ‘respiratory Klebsiella’ used in the current edition of Topley and Wilson.

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Reference