

## Letter to the Editor

Sir,

I wish to refer to the article entitled *Detection of Mycobacterium tuberculosis complex and non-tuberculous mycobacteria by multiplex polymerase chain reactions* by A.S. Mustafa, A.T. Abal and R.D. Chugh, published in your journal, 1999, Vol.5 No.1: 61-70.

The special advantage of this new method, if put to large-scale use, derives from its high degree of sensitivity, specificity and speed. I hope it will also be economically accessible to most of the developing countries where tuberculosis constitutes a major public health problem.

The particular interest of this research is underlined by the need to find new, rapid and reliable diagnostic methods for this old disease of humanity. The diagnostic methods presently used in this field are very old. In fact, the direct sputum examination, which is the main tool for diagnosis, and the tuberculin introduced initially as treatment for tuberculosis, date from the time

of Robert Koch (1843-1910); the X-ray examination from the time of Conrad Roentgen (1845-1923); the histological examination from the time of Ludwig Aschoff (1866-1942), and the mediated auscultation of the chest from the time of Hyacinthe Laennec (1781-1826), the inventor of the stethoscope. Consequently, it seems high time that new, effective and rapid methods of diagnosis for this disease were introduced. In the sphere of antituberculosis drugs, it is true also that most antituberculosis drugs, especially the most common ones, have been in use for the past several decades, with the development of resistance to some of them. It seems that progress in this field as a whole has not been as remarkable as in other fields of medicine; hence the need to work hard in both the diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis in accordance with the urgent demands of modern times.

Professor Yusuf Hersi Ahmed  
Communicable Diseases Operational Officer  
WHO Support Office for Afghanistan