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Introduction

Leprosy is a curable infectious disease. The causative agent, *Mycobacterium leprae*, has the unique capability to infect peripheral nerves, which may lead to varying degrees of neuropathy. In the most severe circumstances, this infection may result in an inability to feel pain in the hands or feet, a loss of digits, and blindness.

Paradoxically, as treatment has become more successful, many specialized centers have closed and few physicians have adequate knowledge about the disease. A strong stigma, based on fear, still contributes to prolonged suffering and delayed diagnosis. Today, the diagnosis and treatment of leprosy also is often impeded by a lack of knowledge and awareness in the healthcare community. This textbook attempts to address the deficiency.

The International Textbook of Leprosy is dedicated to the physicians and health workers caring for their first patient with leprosy, and to all of those in the research community who have encountered some of the fascinating scientific aspects of leprosy and wish to learn more.

—David M Scollard and Thomas P Gillis, Editors