

# *Epidemiologic features of syphilis in an obstetric-gynecologic female population in Trieste, from 1994 to 1998*

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction.** Syphilis is a common sexually transmitted disease and is actually present all over the world. Some epidemiologic studies reported in the past an increase of syphilis incidence in females, especially in USA. In Italy after the period a decreasing (1945-1956) the actual trend is increasing. In the population of Trieste new cases started to appear after 1957. Authors performed a retrospective epidemiologic study concerning the incidence of recent syphilis in female population in Trieste.

**Materials and methods.** We evaluated 17,944 women investigated in our Hospital from 1994 to 1998 by the specific treponemal tests, because latent syphilis is asymptomatic and is usually detectable only by a positive serologic test. These are TPHA (*Treponema pallidum* hemagglutination assay) and the fluorescent treponemal antibody absorption (FTA-ABS) test for confirmation of positivity. Both tests were performed in all women admitted to our Hospital either pregnant or with gynecologic problems (15,368), as well as in females as outpatients (2,306).

**Results.** Total number of TPHA positive tests was 127: 18 (10 hospitalized) in 1994; 21 (16 hospitalized) in 1995; 31 (20 hospitalized) in 1996; 18 (12 hospitalized) in 1997; 39 (27 hospitalized) in 1998. Patients with obstetric problems resulted positive in 2 cases in 1994, 3 in 1995, 5 in 1996, 1 in 1997, 7 in 1998. An infection was assessed in 15 newborns: only in one case cerebral problems were noted. These data, collected in Trieste, during the 5-year period, revealed the incidence of *Treponema pallidum* infection of 5 cases/year per 1000 women.

**Discussion and conclusions.** Trieste has a negative population trend, but our investigation shows a remarkable increase of positive cases. Zar found a discontinuous trend in our town (Graph 1). The high incidence of old positive cases of syphilis could be due to unrecognized infections or an inadequate therapy. According to the study of Zar, we suppose that the recent immigration of young people from Eastern Europe, Africa and South America, as well as sexual behavior of the patients, caused the increase of venereal diseases.

## KEY WORDS

syphilis,  
sexually  
transmitted  
diseases,  
venereal  
diseases

