

PERIURBANIZATION OF LEISHMANIA CHAGASI INFECTION IN RIO GRANDE DO NORTE

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Visceral leishmaniasis caused by *L. chagasi* infection in Latin America is characterized by a wide range of symptoms. The disease was previously seen in the Northeast region of Brazil, with 90% of the cases occurring sporadically in rural areas. However, in the last 20 years a spread of the disease has been observed in Brazil, with a shift of case notification from rural to periurban areas of major Brazilian cities. In the majority of these newly reported VL areas, human infection seems to be preceded by canine infection. Human migratory movements from previously endemic VL areas, in addition to environmental changes induced by human settlements are likely to be involved in the spread leishmaniasis in Brazil. We analyzed the VL cases distribution in Rio Grande do Norte state in comparison to other Brazilian states. Similar to other areas, the majority of VL cases occurred below age 10 and males and females were equally affected in this age group. However, the ratio of VL was skewed towards males above age 10. The initial mortality rate was as high as 10%. Response to antimonial therapy continues to be effective, and co-infection with HIV is being reported. These later cases present a worse response to antimonial therapy. The spread of *Leishmania chagasi* to perimetropolitan areas is of concern since control measures used so far has not been able to effectively control the spread of *Leishmania chagasi* to new areas and as a consequence putting thousands of people at risk of infection.

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