

Annual Congress on

# Mycology and Fungal Infections

November 16-17, 2017 Atlanta, Georgia, USA

## **The rise and the fall of irradiation treatment for ringworm during the first half of the 20th century: A comprehensive historical perspective**

**Shifra Shvarts**

Ben Gurion University, Israel

Throughout the course of human history, ringworm has always been considered as a difficulty to treat disease that carried a stigma, said to be a disease of the poor and the uneducated. The spread of the industrial revolution which prompted countless people to migrate from the farms to the cities; crowded living conditions, poor hygiene and a high incidence of contagious diseases in the cities led to the spread of ringworm on a massive scale, particularly among children. Ringworm had often led to social ostracism that was very detrimental to the life of the child and his family. Traditional treatment entailed manually plucking out hair from the roots to, a painful process that caused mental trauma to children. The invention of the X-ray machine and the discovery that exposure to low doses of X-rays triggers hair loss transformed irradiation into the preferred treatment strategy for ringworm and it was quickly adopted by the medical community as a humane and most advanced treatment protocol for children with ringworm. Irradiation for ringworm from the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until 1960 was the standard treatment for the disease in all western countries. This work examines the rise of irradiation treatment for ringworm and profiles the mass ringworm irradiation campaigns (over 200,000 children) conducted in Eastern Europe, Serbia, Morocco, Israel and the United States in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The work focuses on historical, social and health aspects of various groups treated with irradiation for ringworm, how they coped with the social stigmas associated with the disease and its treatment, as well as the impact of treatment over time on the lives of the irradiated children.

### **Biography**

Shifra Shvarts is a Professor for the history of Medicine and Health Sciences, Ben Gurion University and The Gertner Institute of Epidemiology and Health Policy Research, Sheba Medical Center, Israel. Since 2005, she has concentrated her research on the ways various countries in the world, including Israel, has grappled with latent negative health risks and other ramifications of irradiation in childhood as a treatment regime for ringworm, and subsequent social aspects of this treatment that has arisen, reflected in legislation of a compensation for ringworm victims law by Israel and debate elsewhere over how best to inform former patients and monitor them.

shvarts@bgu.ac.il

### **Notes:**