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Abstract: A working party of people well known internationally in the field of antibiotic sensitivity testing was set up under World Health Organization sponsorship in 1961 to study the reproducibility of antibiotic sensitivity testing. Their aim was to investigate the possibility of introducing standard techniques which might become universal reference methods. The work involved 16 laboratories. Each was provided with the same 16 organisms, supplies of standard media and antibiotics and precise instructions for their use.
laboratories determined the minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) of each antibiotic by broth and agar dilution methods and the size of inhibition zones produced by agar diffusion.

The results were examined statistically. Of the two dilution techniques, the broth method tended to give higher MICs with all antibiotics except tetra-cycline, the difference exceeding 1 doubling dilution step in 9 of 45 sets of results. The agar method produced scattered results, 75 of 675 observations differing by more than 1 doubling dilution step from the median. A mathematical treatment allowed a direct comparison between the results of dilution and diffusion tests to be made. This showed the diffusion technique to be somewhat more reproducible than either of the dilution tests.

The Report sets out the methods recommended by the working party for the performance of the three types of test and proposes that these be adopted as reference techniques. Much of the detail of these recommendations depends on the investigations done for the purpose by members of the working party and others. These investigations are reported in extended summary form giving much valuable information on topics including media, inoculum size and antibiotic stability.

Although primarily concerned with reference methods, the working party also made recommendations relating to routine sensitivity testing in clinical bacteriology. It proposed a system of reporting bacterial sensitivity in 4 grades, related to the MICs of the organisms concerned and the antibiotic levels probably attainable at their point of action. The grades are described in some detail together with proposals for practical methods. This is a very important report. All microbiologists having to do with antibiotics should read it.

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