Bruce and Brucellosis

Ever since man began to domesticate animals (especially the cow, pig, goat, dog, chicken and duck) he has been afflicted by fevers. Hippocrates reportedly described a low-grade fever with regular “remissions” all around the Mediterranean basin, which has become known variously as Malta fever, Mediterranean fever or undulant fever.

Nineteenth century

- 1862: J.S. Marchali, an associate surgeon in the British Army, noted that British troops stationed in Malta during the Crimean War were suffering from a “undulant fever.” The average time off to convalesce was 90 days with significant mortality.
- 1879: Halleux suggested that in patients he was seeing there was a distinction between the undulant fever and the mal de chien, which also caused fever and recurring fever.
- 1880–1881: Dr. Edward Jenner, based on his research in Malta (Malta’s capital) where he carried out research into Malta fever. He isolated the organism from the spleen of a victim and confirmed the finding by injecting it into seven other laboratory mice. Seven monkeys injected with the organism suffered a little fever and four died. He named the organism Micrococcus mallei from the Latin name for Malta (Malta, meaning the “beaten tile”).

Twentieth century

- 1904–1905: In consequence of plague findings, the Mediterranean fever Commission was set up and visited the island. The main aim of the commission was to determine the cause of the different epidemic of the disease.
- 1904: The combined efforts of the commission were to determine the cause of the different epidemic of the disease.
- 1904: Sir David Bruce, the only Malta fever discovered the cause of the disease. Bruce’s research led him to conclude that the fever was caused by a specific microorganism, which he named “B. melitensis.”
- 1917: Sir David Bruce was made a Knight Commander of the Bath.
- 1930: Kennedy’s suggestion of the change of name was accepted, and the name was officially changed to Malta fever.
- 1928–1931: T. Macaulay and A. Ainslie described the specific method of distinguishing the various brucellosis species using the ability to grow in the presence of the antiserum.
- 1957: The disease was only known as Malta fever, and the type of milk was banned from consumption because it was suspected of being a cause of the disease.