



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



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### **REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON HEALTH RESEARCH**

The XXXIII Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR) of PAHO/WHO was held in Caracas, Venezuela, from 1 to 3 June 1998. The invitation to hold this meeting in Venezuela was issued jointly by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the National Council of Scientific and Technological Research. The Committee discussed general topics related to health research policies in the countries of the Region, the research situation in Venezuela, and PAHO/WHO cooperation activities in this field.

One of the more significant presentations and discussions centered on the research promotion activities of the national councils of science and technology of Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Venezuela. The presentations by the representatives of the councils in attendance can serve as the basis for developing orientations for common policies, such as making social demands the main focus of research policies; developing partnerships with different actors, including the private sector, for financing and conducting research; establishing networks to promote collaboration between investigators and systems for evaluating individual scientific output; decentralizing science and technology (S&T) activities in health, and promoting regional cooperation agreements. The Committee pointed out the positive aspects of these trends and noted a number of potential distortions, recommending measures to avoid them.

The Minister of Health and Social Welfare of Venezuela, Dr. José Félix Oletta, gave a presentation on the status of health research in his country. This was followed by the presentations of Venezuelan S&T investigators and administrators. Regarding the technical cooperation activities of PAHO, a highlight of the Meeting was the discussion on the Virtual Health Library. The Committee recognized the importance of this initiative not only for its capacity to reduce inequities and increase access to health information, but also for its decentralized implementation strategy, which will enable the countries of the

Region to develop capabilities in technologies of strategic importance in information science, communications, etc. The Committee reviewed three technical areas of PAHO/WHO cooperation activities in health research, the Research Grants Program (particularly the results of the multicenter project on violence and health), and other topics.

One of the principal recommendations of the Committee was to promote increased linkage and joint activities among PAHO, the national councils of science and technology, and the ministries of health. It was suggested that such activities include the preparation of a research agenda emphasizing topics relevant for assessing the health impact of regional processes, which must involve a regional collaborative effort. Another opportunity for joint activities would be human resources development, particularly the creation of a regional grants fund to promote the exchange of young investigators.

This report to the Director is submitted to the 25th Pan American Sanitary Conference for study and discussion.

Annex

PAHO/ACHR/98.14

**FINAL**

**Original: Spanish**

XXXIII ACHR

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*Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Health Research  
of the Pan American Health Organization  
1 to 3 June 1998  
Caracas, Venezuela*

**REPORT TO THE DIRECTOR**



Research Coordination  
Division of Health and Human Development  
Pan American Health Organization  
*Pan American Sanitary Bureau • Regional Office of the*  
World Health Organization  
Washington, D.C.  
1998

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**REPORT ON THE XXXIII MEETING OF THE ACHR**  
**1 to 3 June 1998**  
**Caracas, Venezuela**

**I. Summary of the Presentations**

**1. Inaugural Session**

***Opening Remarks of the Director of PAHO/WHO, Dr. George Alleyne***

Dr. Alleyne expressed his satisfaction to have a meeting of the ACHR again in Caracas after 16 years. He indicated that the decision to have this meeting in this country once more is due, not only to the kind invitation from the Ministry of Health and the CONICIT of Venezuela, but also to the respect and admiration that PAHO has for science development in Venezuela. Also, he stated his satisfaction for the decision of having the ACHR meetings held annually again, thus permitting the Committee to closely follow, evaluate, and make important recommendations on the Organization's activities concerning research. At a time of reduced resources, the Committee has greatly helped in the development of creativity to better take advantage of these limited resources. Dr. Alleyne recognized that in some areas, as Research in Health Systems and Services, the expected goals have not been attained. He concluded emphasizing the importance of health research and information in highlighting health as the essential component of human development.

***Opening Remarks of the President of the ACHR, Dr. Carlos Morel***

Dr. Morel began stating his great satisfaction and honor for being Chairman of the ACHR and reiterated the importance of having annual meetings. He pointed out the difficult task that the Committee faces in raising awareness among the decision-makers as well as the general public on the importance of research at a time when everyone thinks in the short-term. He manifested, however, his optimism in the face of certain important trends, for example, the changes in the WHO environment which are generating a new work atmosphere. He added that, the presence of the CONICITs and the Minister of Health at this meeting represent the possibility of new alliances and the placement of health research at a high level on the political agenda.

***Opening Remarks of the Vice President of CONICIT/Venezuela, Dr. Claudio Bifano***

Dr. Bifano thanked Dr. Alleyne for his words about research in Venezuela. He emphasized that the task of CONICIT is to promote research to serve social needs. Likewise, he expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to make a presentation during the work sessions about the activities CONICIT has been developing and requested observations and recommendations from the Committee on the same.

***Opening Remarks of the Minister Health and Social Welfare of Venezuela, Dr. José F. Oletta***

Dr. Oletta expressed his satisfaction for hosting the Committee and for PAHO's acceptance to Venezuela's invitation. He said that in spite of the important contributions by Venezuelan science to health, as the case of endemic diseases, health research in the country presents problems such as excessive dependency on State resources, which makes it very vulnerable to reductions in public spending and weak ties with the goods and services productive sector. With the reform processes of the role of the State, it should assume the responsibility of defining the research policies and priorities, establishing information systems, and mobilizing resources. Cooperation among countries should play a more prominent role in the promotion of regional integration and the better utilization of international experience in defining research policies to reduce inequities and improve health care systems.

**2. Promotion and Development of Research by the Councils of Science and Technology of Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Venezuela**

***Brazil***

In the last two years, the CNPq has been changing the way of promoting research, fostering the induction of research in priority areas instead of serving only spontaneous demand. The Health Program is registered within this strategy.

Dr. José Ubirayara Alves, Vice President of the CNPq, presented some data about the resources that CNPq has allocated to health research (nearly US\$100 million/year). He also presented the background that led to establishing the Health Program, pointing out the epidemiological changes, the need for increasing resources for health research and the lack of instruments for induction and knowledge dissemination. The Program objective is to link S&T activities to the country's health policies and strategies.

The program seeks to mobilize researchers toward selected subjects, creating networks among them and promoting joint ventures between various actors. The priority issues are: poverty and inequities, emerging infectious diseases, health of the elderly, accidents/violent acts, health systems and policies, S&T in health, immunobiologicals, and drugs.

The researchers are called to present projects in these areas by invitation and the review of proposals is based on quality/excellence criteria and their importance in solving problems.

### ***Costa Rica***

Dr. Rodrigo Zeledón, President of CONICIT/Costa Rica, initially presented a series of indicators on the economic and social situation of the country, pointing out the new educational and investment policies directed to enable the country to master new technologies, particularly in information science. In regard to research, he pointed out the importance of the creation of the CONICIT in 1972, and the IDB loan of 37 million dollars in 1990 that gave new impetus to scientific and technological activities in the country.

With the resources of this loan, several laboratories and institutes, as well as specialized information centers were built. Dr. Zeledón presented several successful examples of projects executed with resources of this loan, which made it possible also to mobilize private sector resources. Although health research quantitatively never had great relevance within the CONICIT, new problems derived from the health situation in the country—characteristic of an advanced epidemiological transition—demand research, as is the case of high prevalence in stomach cancer.

### ***Mexico***

Dr. Jaime Martuscelli, Deputy Director of Scientific Research, in the name of Mr. Carlos Bazdresch, Director General of the CONACyT, presented the activities of the National Board of Science and Technology of Mexico (CONACyT). Dr. Martuscelli pointed out that the Mexican government has the commitment to promote S&T activities, as expressed in the Program of Science and Technology 1995-2000, a regulatory instrument of scientific policy of the Federal Executive Branch.

The central objective of this program is to promote scientific development in the country, based on:



- Increasing the number of fellows and expert graduate-level programs;
- Increasing the quality of research projects and effectively linking them with social and economic development problems in Mexico;
- Encouraging innovation in private companies;
- Promoting an authentic scientific and technological culture;
- Strengthening the decentralization process of academic activities;
- Developing mega-projects; and
- Attending to the development of emerging sciences, among others.

In order to carry out this Program, a set of activities in which the CONACyT participates fundamentally has been envisaged. Among these, Dr. Martuscelli pointed out those whose objective is to increase the roster of scientists and technologists through fellowships-credit aimed at young people who attempt to conduct graduate studies in institutions within the country or abroad. The Council also aspires to consolidate the master and doctorate programs on a national level by allocating fellowships with resources of the *Fondo para el Fortalecimiento del Posgrado* (Fund for post Graduate Strengthening). In 1997, \$50 million were committed to support 26 programs in 18 institutions.

Another of the Council's fundamental responsibilities is to administer the National Researchers System (SNI). The System grants, differently, an economic incentive so that beneficiaries can devote themselves on a full-time basis to scientific or technological tasks. This year, the number of members assigned to the SNI is 6,356, an increase in 6.5% with regard to last year. Ten per cent of these SNI researchers belong to the area of health.

CONACyT also conducts a Program in Support of Science in Mexico--PACIME - sponsored by the Federal Government and, partly, through a World Bank credit, of which, 7% is taken by health disciplines. In its five years of existence, the PACIME supported more than 3,700 research projects and over 300 projects of scientific and technological infrastructure.

Another program of great importance is that of repatriations, intended to facilitate the expeditious contracting of Mexican researchers living abroad by universities and centers of the country. This program consists of transferring an amount equivalent to wages, benefits, incentives, SNI analogous fellowship, and other advantages to the receiving institution. During 1997, more than \$30 million pesos were allocated to this program in support of 230 researchers.

Aiming to improve the quality of national journals, CONACyT has established the Index of Mexican Journals of Scientific and Technological Research. Other initiatives worth mentioning refer to the Regional Research Systems that try to promote an authentic decentralization, and the agreements to tighten the ties between the domestic scientific community and its homologous abroad. The Council has also tried to tighten another type of tie, particularly that between

Academy and Industry, and also to create incentives to expand the innovative demand of companies. In 1997, the regulation of various funds was adopted for this purpose.

Currently, 93% of CONACyT resources are allocated to directly support the promotion of science and technology, only 7% of it is taken for administrative expenditures. The Council is greatly emphasizing evaluation mechanisms to achieve optimal allocation of the financial resources earmarked for science development. Dr. Martuscelli closed his presentation expressing his certainty that the capacity of the CONACyT may be enlarged through cooperation and exchange with other organizations present at this meeting.

### ***Venezuela***

Dr. Claudio Bifano, Vice President of CONICIT, began by presenting the Council's principal strategic orientations. He pointed out the Council's impetus towards supporting research of high quality as well as efficient and pertinent to social and economic demands. The strategies also include supporting the technological development of the national productive apparatus; expanding the opportunities for dialogue; and promoting new institutional schemes for regional research development. Attention to social demands is the great pivotal axis of all these strategies.

In regard to specific activities to strengthen research training, Dr. Bifano referred to the training of researchers, the incorporation of researchers to national institutions, and the mobilization of researchers in Congresses and international internships. Support for post-graduate programs is given, not only to isolated programs, but also to groups of programs in certain areas, by promoting cooperation and collaboration of researchers acting in those areas. Support to research is provided both by sponsoring research projects and by supporting research groups that must submit a medium or long-term program. CONICIT also supports strengthening the infrastructure of consolidated and emerging laboratories.

Research support is induced, based on agendas constructed with the participation of various actors. Currently there are 17 agendas, health among them. Peers and laymen review the projects that respond to the invitations in aspects of quality and importance, respectively. With regard to financing, a fund has been created for promoting research on a regional scale (decentralization) and shared financing is practiced with the private sector, which contributes  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the project costs.

### **3. PAHO/WHO technical cooperation in Scientific and Technical Health Information**

Mr. Abel Packer of BIREME began his presentation of this subject with a historical review. He pointed out that for 30 years the Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Information System (Regional System) and BIREME have successfully developed the capacity of the countries of the Region to create and operate national scientific and technical Information systems in step with the emergence of new organizational paradigms and information treatments. In recent years, the demand for technical cooperation of products and services based on the Internet has required new changes in BIREME and the Regional System.

This need for changes in the current model led to the establishment of the BIREME External Evaluation Commission, by PAHO's Director, in July and August of 1997. This Commission, in its report, recognized the fundamental role BIREME has played in promoting technical cooperation and recommended strengthening its leadership in this regard.

The proposal to create and develop the Virtual Health Library (VHL), under BIREME's leadership, represents the adoption of a new organizational paradigm and treatment of information that responds coherently to the recommendations of the External Evaluation Commission and the new demands for technical cooperation.

The VHL represents an expansion of the current technical cooperation model by promoting the decentralized production and operation of multimedia information sources, connected in network, with direct and universal access, and no geographic nor time constraints. Mr. Packer described in detail the VHL characteristics and components, including an *on-line* demonstration in the Internet of the progress already achieved, particularly with regard to the SciELO that corresponds to the electronic publication component.

BIREME has defined a plan of action for implementation of the VHL, based on 5 lines: promotion and marketing; realignment of products and traditional services; production of electronic publications; development of information integration and location tools; and development of other VHL components. The plan of action will be implemented within a three-year period, between April 1998 and March of 2001.

Mr. Packer finalized his presentation emphasizing the capacity of BIREME and the Regional System, demonstrated in the last thirty years, to promote the necessary changes for the adoption of new paradigms, as it is the case of creation and development of the VHL.

#### **4. Research in the Social Sciences and Health in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Dr. Roberto Briceño-León, Dr. Mario Bronfman and Dr. Elssy Bonilla Castro, all members of the ACHR, presented this topic. Dr. Briceño-León began by showing health research trends in regard to the social sciences by classifying the works by purpose of the research, ways to carry out the investigation, and methods in which to report the results.

Bearing in mind that research in this area is very much oriented to attain a given purpose, Dr. Briceño-León presented a typology of HSS research in Latin America, in four dominant forms according to the purposes aimed at:

- as a way of learning a new reality or explaining, socially, a given epidemiological reality;
- as a way of contributing to effectiveness of health systems;
- as a way of criticizing society;
- as a way of strengthening people.

Characteristics of each of these types were presented, pointing out that, in practice, they are never presented purely.

In regard to the ways research is carried out, there have been important differences in the ways of interpreting the relationship between theory and field research, in the use of qualitative and quantitative methods, and with regard to the trends of data collection and their analysis. He referred to research with an important field study component but whose data are not interpreted in a theoretical perspective, and to those which, on the contrary, do not have empirical basis and are limited to hermeneutic or reflexive exercises. He also referred to tensions between the quantitative and qualitative methods, pointing out that an important attempt at combining these techniques is currently being done and those who make surveys no longer disagree a great deal with those who utilize life histories.

The medium in which to report results also has been changing. The dominant mode is the publication of books or gray literature, given the short-lived tradition of scientific journals in the Region. However, due to the limitations in the publication and distribution of books, and the implementation of new academic evaluation mechanisms, journal articles are beginning to gain strength as the suitable mechanism to disseminate results.

In regard to teams, the most traditional is that of the social scientist incorporated as assistant in a project directed by a biomedical scientist, although the projects designed and directed by social scientists are increasing. What is still difficult is the equality in interdisciplinary work due to tradition, the way of governing institutions, and the lack of shared training.

Following this initial presentation by Dr. Briceño-León, Dr. Mario Bronfman presented the forms of organization in the scientific community prevailing in the field of the social sciences applied to health. He referred to the fact that in many countries of the Region, events developed that bring together the scientists who work in this interdisciplinary space, some of which have become a tradition and are massive meetings. As an example, he cited the Medical Anthropology and the Abrasco Congresses in Brazil, the Primary Health Care Days in Argentina, the National Congress of Public Health in Mexico and other events in which the participation of social scientists devoted to health has been numerous and significant.

Dr. Bronfman sought, however, to concentrate on those initiatives that have a regional scope and among them he pointed out the Latin American Association of Social Medicine (ALAMES) and the International Forum for the Social Sciences in Health (FORUM). He mentioned elements of the history of both associations, their objectives, the congresses organized, etc., concluding that their development should be supported since both aim toward an integrating vision of health problems and they count with the participation of many renowned academicians in the Region.

He also explored a topic that concentrates the concern of many of the people involved in the field of health, as is the utilization of research findings in decision-making. He considers that this subject should be addressed from the social sciences perspective and methodology and pointed out that few works have studied this relationship. Within the framework of priorities set by the FORUM, the principal conclusions of a study started in Mexico in 1994 were presented. The study permitted the identification, both of the elements that favor the utilization of research findings and the obstacles for the transfer of research findings to decision-making, policies, and programs.

After mentioning the principal findings, Dr. Bronfman made some recommendations to improve communication between researchers and decision-makers, and to increase the probabilities that results of the scientific work be utilized for the formulation and application of policies, recognizing that this last objective is much more difficult to achieve.

Dr. Bonilla finished her presentation on this topic by recommending improving the response capacity of social sciences to the old and new challenges derived from the health situation in Latin America and the Caribbean. She mentioned some of these challenges, such as those related to the globalization process, the deterioration of socioeconomic conditions with increased poverty and unemployment, the problems of equity, quality, and efficiency of health systems, and the complex epidemiological profile of the Region where old and new problems coexist.

Despite the importance of these subjects, it is observed that research interests of social scientists have been oriented predominantly toward other social problems, giving priority to understanding education problems over those of health. Among the explanatory hypotheses of this phenomenon it may be mentioned that the social scientists of the Region, until quite recently, have been more interested in studying the factors related to economic growth than those related to social development. And that the state of well being of the people has been analyzed from the poverty perspective and, unfortunately based on very narrow conceptions of poverty.

Finally, Dr. Bonilla made some recommendations for strengthening social sciences research in health, among which she pointed out:

- to create a special group linked to the ACHR to act for a fixed period (not longer than 2 years) to design and implement a strategy to make it possible to interest, motivate, and stimulate the social sciences scientific community in carrying out health research;
- to promote interdisciplinary studies led by social science researchers;
- to promote the creation of inter-institutional funding, especially among multilateral banking, to support research projects on chosen subjects, and to support the training of researchers;
- to establish agreements with universities and renowned research centers to support the operation of researchers networks
- to promote the participation of social scientists in the PAHO/WHO decision-making process.

## **5. Health Research in Venezuela**

Dr. José Felix Oletta, Minister of Health, and Social Welfare of Venezuela initially presented this topic. He stated that, despite the ample acknowledgement of research in promoting well being, health research in Venezuela has serious problems such as low production and utilization. In addition, it receives some external influences that are not always consistent with the interests of the country. Next, Dr. Oletta reviewed the main historical facts, pointing out the creation of ASOVAC and IVIC in the 1960s and the development of universities and oil technologies in the 1970s. The 1980s and beginning of the 1990s are marked by important social and financial crises with an impact on S&T activities, requiring new strategies to face them.

After Dr. Oletta referred to the principal objectives and strategies of health system reforms, he presented indicators on the health research situation, pointing out some of the principal problems such as lack of researchers, low salaries, and low social recognition, as well as the country's economic and fiscal instability with serious consequences for research financing.

Notwithstanding these problems, there are positive trends, such as the creation, in his Ministry, of the Education and Research Bureau, dedicated to define standards and policies, as well as, the existence of initiatives of incentives for researchers according to productivity. He also pointed out the excellence of some research centers linked to the Ministry. The Ministry has defined a series of research priorities such as epidemiological research of some diseases of importance for the public health, HSSR, health and environment, among others. The implementation of these priorities goes through a series of strategies like tightening links between researchers and decision-makers, mobilization of resources, establishment of collaboration networks, promotion of ethics in research, etc.

In concluding, Dr. Oletta referred to the importance of more general promotional S&T strategies such as mastery of technological development, reorganization of the S&T system, regional integration, strengthening the State's capability to convene various actors, define policies, and create closer cooperating ties at the international level.

Following Dr. Oletta's presentation, a panel with the following presentations was organized:

Dr. Egidio Romano, of IVIC, presented the activities of the bio-derivatives production plant that became a non-profit company (Quimbiotec). This company produces plasma derivatives like albumin, IgG, and factor VIII for the national market, the Caribbean, and the Andean Region. Data on infrastructure, products, and technologies were also presented.

Dr. María Cristina di Prisco, of the Biomedicine Institute of the UCV, presented the activities of the University Bioalergen Company, dedicated to allergen production, including recombinant allergens. The allergens produced by the company are more adequate for diagnosis of allergies prevalent in the country and less costly. However, the company has been facing serious difficulties due to the great financial deficits it faces.

Dr. Oscar Noya of the Laboratory of Malariology reported a series of research activities aimed at supporting the malaria control programs, pointing out the field trials of the polypeptide vaccine developed in Colombia, which showed nearly 50% protection. As a consequence of the technology transfer agreements with the laboratory in Colombia, it was possible to master the polypeptide synthesis technology currently being used to develop diagnostic tests with latex.

Dr. Francisco Araoz, Director of the INH "Rafael Rangel", presented the principal activities that the Institute is developing in the areas of diagnosis/epidemiology, production, scientific training and regulation, with a view to supporting the Ministry's programs of surveillance, health promotion and protection. He

presented data on the INH priorities, strategies, and infrastructure, pointing out its applied research characteristics. The Institute faces problems related to human resources financing and motivation.

Dr. María Esperanza Martínez, of CONICIT/Venezuela, presented the Health Agenda in Bordering States, pointing out that the Agenda is a methodology for S&T management that includes institutional strategies and definition of research lines by means of social mobilization processes. After nearly two years of work with the participation of producers and users of knowledge, a research agenda derived from health problems related to living conditions was agreed upon. A call for proposals made it possible to generate 77 project profiles that are being enhanced in training workshops. Project review is performed based on such criteria as clear identification of user, inter-institutional and inter-disciplinary characteristics, relevance, opportunity, feasibility, and excellence.

Dr. Renato Valdivieso, of the Polar Foundation, presented the activities carried out by that private Foundation. He pointed out the Venezuelan Scientist Award (granted to 40 scientists since its creation in 1983); the Symposia Polar Foundation, that become an opportunity for discussion on subjects of national interest between communities of national and international researchers. The next symposium will be on tropical diseases. Finally, he made reference to the creation of a national researcher database to be disseminated through the Internet.

## **6. Health Research in the 21st Century and the Role of WHO and PAHO**

Dr. T. M. Fliedner, Chairman of the Global ACHR, presented this topic. He referred to the progress in consolidating the ACHR system, whose members participated actively in preparing the Global Research Agenda. The resolution of the 1990 World Health Assembly unleashed the development process of the Agenda, which included a series of workshops with participation of various actors at the global level.

The Research Agenda has as its objective to support the implementation of the new strategies of Health for All in the 21st Century and it is centered on problems of critical significance for global health, such as, population growth, urbanization, environmental deterioration, changes in the systems of values, migrations, etc. The Agenda attempts to translate these problems into challenges for the scientific community, promoting a multidisciplinary effort to face them.

The Agenda, following a chapter of analysis of the problems mentioned, presents strategies for strengthening research capability, opportunities and imperatives (to avoid the word priority) for research. A methodology is also presented to establish a visual profile of the health status of a country, that would



permit comparisons, monitor changes, and formulate association hypotheses among several variables.

Implementation of the agenda is based on collaboration networks among researchers. These networks called IRENE (Intelligent Research Networks) should utilize the newest communication technologies. It is expected that WHO and its regional offices will fulfill a catalytic role, mobilizing resources, in particular, those of the Collaborating Centers.

## **7. Research Promotional Activities in some Technical Areas of PAHO/WHO:**

### ***Health Systems and Services Research (HSSR)***

This subject was presented by Dr. Daniel López Acuña, Director of the Division of Health Systems and Services Development (HSP) of PAHO. Dr. López Acuña began by referring to the processes of health sector reform going on throughout the Region aimed at increasing equity, efficiency, and quality of health systems and services.

During the present biennium 1998-1999, HSP will address, among other priorities, the strengthening of the HSSR. It is timely to do so now because the conceptual HSS framework of cooperation is defined. The HSSR that the Organization promotes should be used to strengthen the areas of HSS cooperation and to generate knowledge that can support HSS reorientation or reorganization.

In the last two decades, WHO and PAHO have contributed to HSSR development. PAHO has promoted HSSR in Latin America and the Caribbean, supported training of researchers in this field, financed research projects, and developed proposals in different areas. Both PAHO and WHO have concentrated HSSR financing in the larger countries of the Region, where there is greater capacity for research (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Mexico). A challenge for both organizations is HSSR support in the smaller countries, which are also immersed in the sector reform process.

Dr. López-Acuña referred next to the various groups and actors arising from the HSSR scenario. Among these, he mentioned the International Cooperation Federation of the Health Systems and Services Research Centers (FICOSSER); the Council on Health Research for Development (COHRED)—established in 1993; the Research on Health Systems and Services Network of the Southern Cone—founded in 1994; the International Initiative of Information System and Analysis in the Health Sector Reform (IHSRI); the Policies and Health Systems Research Network in Central America and the Caribbean (REISSCA); and the Alliance for Policies and Health Systems Research (AHPSR). The PAHO/WHO Collaborating

Centers with emphasis on HSSR are also another group to be considered, in addition to the agencies, institutions, and donor governments interested in supporting HSSR promotion and development. Among them, he mentioned the International Development Research Center (IDRC), the Swedish International Cooperation Agency for Development (SIDA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, the World Bank, the Inter-American Bank for Development (IDB), the Danish Cooperation (DANIDA), the University of Montreal, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

In April 1989, the Director of PAHO established the Sub-Committee of Health Systems and Services Research (SCHSSR) to advise him on the formulation of policies, priorities, and technical cooperation strategies for the development of HSSR. In 1995, the SCHSSR was re-formed and held a meeting in which a Plan of Work was prepared. During 1998, at the end of the structural and functional reorganization of PAHO's HSP Division, it is intended to summon the SCHSSR to review the substantive plans of the Division and redefine the promotion and support activities for the HSSR.

### ***Infectious Diseases***

Dr. Gabriel Schmunis, Coordinator of the Communicable Diseases Program of the Division of Disease Prevention and Control (HCP/HCT), presented the principal orientations of the research component of this PAHO/WHO technical area. He began by summarizing the Program principal work areas and lines of action and pointing out the efforts to eradicate a series of diseases.

He reviewed the current situation of communicable diseases in the Region, indicating that communicable diseases continue to be a major cause of morbidity and mortality in the Region. Acute respiratory infections (ARI), diarrheal diseases, cholera, malnutrition, malaria, vaccine-preventable diseases, meningitis, and septicemia cause more than 200,000 annual deaths in children under five in the countries of the Americas. He referred to the progress status of the control activities of various diseases as Chagas, onchocerciasis, filariasis, leprosy, diseases by blood transfusion, tuberculosis, dengue, malaria, leishmaniasis, and newly emerging and reemerging infectious diseases.

Taking into consideration the Organization mandates, the epidemiological situation, and the available resources, the research promoted, coordinated, and sponsored by HCT is a mixture of basic and applied research. Dr. Schmunis made a summary of some research activities, in which HCT was involved, grouped as per the disease studied.

In regard to the infectious diseases transmitted through blood transfusion, a study of the potential risk to contract infectious disease by contaminated blood was conducted in seven South American and five Central American countries. Data

analysis indicated that, while 9 of the 12 countries examined 100% of donors to detect the HIV virus, only 3 reported complete sifting of the blood for VHB. Coverage of blood sifting for VHC did not reach 100% in any country. In addition, in 6 countries, there was no screening for syphilis and only in 2 examinations of *Trypanosome cruzi* were carried out. These results underscore the need for creating an information system that makes it possible to evaluate the state of blood sifting for infectious diseases. They will also serve as a reference point to measure future achievements.

In regard to childhood illnesses, Dr. Schmunis reported various studies on epidemiology and risk factors determination, which indicated that ARI (acute respiratory infections) are an important cause of death in children under 5, since they are responsible for 12% of deaths in this age group. It was found that malnutrition, low birthweight, lack of breast-feeding, and the existence of infection background were significant risk factors. Several studies were conducted in regard to clinical aspects and treatment, among them, the evaluation of standard case management of pneumonia with various antibiotics, and sensitivity determination of 59 strains of *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, isolated from pneumonia cases. It was found that 98% of the strains showed sensitivity to penicillin and ampicillin. Intervention evaluation studies were also conducted such as the strategy of standard management of ARI cases proposed by PAHO/WHO. Evaluation of this strategy carried out in various cities of the Region indicates a reduction in mortality, in the use of antibiotics, and in the degree of chest x-ray utilization.

In regard to malaria, research for development and testing of immunizing antigens was done, obtaining monoclonal antibodies (AcM) that identify new malaria antigens, which were characterized and should be utilized to develop a vaccine. Several studies under way for the development of these vaccines were mentioned. Due to contradictory results in the evaluation of a malarial vaccine (SPf66) obtained in the Region, other controlled random tests were carried out which did not reveal any considerable protective effect.

In regard to Chagas' disease, an important question is if children of the areas where the transmission by vectors is diminishing or being interrupted should be treated. A random controlled test, double-blind and with placebo, was carried out in a rural area of Brazil affected by endemic Chagas' disease; it was concluded that a 60-day treatment with benzenidazol is useful for treatment of the incipient chronic infection by *T. cruzi*. Another study in 6,013 blood donors was conducted to establish the potential risk of contracting *T. cruzi* infection by blood transfusion in the Southern states of the United States. It was indicated that the possibility of this happening is minimal.

In concluding, Dr. Schmunis reviewed the technical cooperation activities to improve the national research capabilities in this area, indicating that an increase in the capacity of protocol preparation, epidemiology data analysis, and development

of research operations for the control programs has been observed. After reviewing the principal projects supported by HCT since 1995, he concluded by indicating the lines of future research that should include research on diseases transmitted through transfusions, operative research on family attitudes and practices in regard to ARI, ARI resistance to antibiotics, tests of potential DNA immunizing products for malaria, monitoring resistant *P. falciparum* and *P. vivax* strains, and monitoring antibiotics resistance by different enteric pathogens.

### ***Health and Environment***

Activities in this area were presented by Dr. Luis Augusto Galvão, of the Division of Health and Environment (HEP) of PAHO. Dr. Galvão began by presenting the projects supported during the period 1990-1998, indicating that most of them refer to applied research, operational research, or descriptive studies on special subjects. During this period, 153 research projects on health and environment were carried out in 18 countries of the Region supported by PAHO/WHO. It is estimated that more than 570 people have participated in them. The most important areas or topics were those related to basic sanitation services, environmental quality, primary environmental care, risk control, chemical safety and workers' health. Financial support from cooperating agencies for this research amounted to US\$ 2,472,972, of which US\$ 781,562 corresponds to PAHO/WHO and US\$ 1,691,410 to other domestic and international financing sources.

The research in health and environment priorities established by HEP are the following:

1. Development of policies and initiatives on health, environment, and development.
2. Evaluation of the effects on human health of water and air pollutants, and of special residues, as well as evaluation of control measures of these pollutants.
3. Evaluation and control of workers' health risks derived from working conditions.

Analysis of the projects approved in that period indicates there was little activity in area 1, since the only research carried out was on environmental policies and none related to sustainable development, health districts, housing, tourism, or environment. There was a great deal of activity with regard to area 2 as revealed by the great amount of work on primary environmental care, chemical safety, risks control, wastewater treatment, and water resources. Area 3 also had a great deal of activity as the 35 research projects carried out related to workers' health.

Next, Dr. Galvão presented some important progress made in implementing the orientations for research promotion in the area of health and environment presented by HEP in the 1995 meeting of the ACHR. These orientations were:

- a) to establish and support a new research program on issues that influence health, environment and development;
- b) to establish activities aimed at improving communications among researchers, managers, and the general population by making knowledge and information available to them;
- c) to carry out activities whose objective would be to improve the capacity of governments, institutions, companies, and agencies to carry out research, establish priorities, and formulate research plans for health and the environment.

With regard to item a, in 1990, PAHO signed an agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S.EPA), to determine the status of environmental epidemiology in Latin America and the Caribbean, and to establish priority actions in this area. A study to diagnose the situation was carried out, resulting in a publication, and a small fellowship program was established to support studies of this area in the Region.

Another cooperative agreement between the U.S. CDC and PAHO has also been implemented. Through it, several research and human resources development projects related to the air pollution effects on health have been supported, mainly in Mexico City.

Another project of importance in support of research is the Pan American Network of Management of Waste--REPAMAR project: - coordinated by the Pan American Center for Sanitary Engineering and Environmental Sciences (CEPIS/HEP). For more than 10 years this project has had the support of the German Government, through its Technical Cooperation Agency GTZ. REPAMAR proposes to promote that waste management be carried out in an adequate and sustainable way in the Region of the Americas.

As an example of development in item b, Dr. Galvão presented studies on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and studies on the effects of lead exposure in health. With respect to item c, he mentioned the Project on Occupational and Environmental aspects of Pesticides in the Central American Isthmus (PLAGSALUD) and the Project on Occupational Health in the Oil Industry (SOIP). This last project is the subject of an agreement between the Ministry of Health of Colombia, the Colombian Oil Company ECOPETROL, the Syndicate Workers Union (USE), and the Pan American Health Organization PAHO to obtain a diagnosis of the situation and to define future lines of preventive action. However, due to the nature of the agreement between the company and the union and to its design, this project had some limitations. Its implementation represents an innovative activity of applied research in Latin America and the data obtained can be utilized widely by other similar industrial plants in the Region.

Dr. Galvão finished his presentation by mentioning that great interest is perceived in the Region toward research related to primary environmental care, risk

control, chemical safety and workers' health. Research activities in health and environment have increased in the Region of the Americas. The support that PAHO/WHO and other national and international cooperation agencies have given to these activities is promoting the formation of professionals and technical and scientific groups in the Region with the ability to evaluate environmental situations and to develop appropriate methodologies and technologies in the face of problems.

In closing, he recommended to continue with the promotion of research on health effects of the chemical and physical agents disseminated in the environment by agricultural and industrial processes, as well as, on ways to control them. In the traditional areas of environmental sanitation, such as pollution of water supplies, sewerage, solid waste and control of water resources, the development of new technologies, as well as training and strengthening of research groups in that area should be supported. He recommended also to maintain support of information systems that allow research efforts being carried out in the Region to be known in other parts of the world in order to facilitate sharing of experiences and interaction among investigators.

#### **8. Progress report on the Multicenter Projects and Research Competitions promoted by the PAHO/WHO Research Grants Program**

Dr. Rebecca de los Ríos (HDP/HDR) submitted a progress report on the new modalities of the Grants Program, particularly the Multicenter Projects and the Research Competitions.

##### ***Multicenter Projects***

*a) Multicenter Project: Attitudes and Cultural Standards on Violence in Selected Cities (Project ACTIVA) - Approved in 1996*

Project ACTIVA culminated its stage of data collection in April 1997, and in January 1998, the process of data analysis at the national and regional levels was completed. PAHO's Research Program is coordinating the publication of results with the collaboration of the principal investigators and other invited authors.

*b) Multicenter Study: Health, Well-being, and Aging (Project SABE) - Approved in 1997*

Implementation of this project started in April 1997, with the following activities and results being fulfilled in this first year:

- Meetings and workshops with researchers and experts, to prepare the protocol framework and the questionnaire. The definitive version of the questionnaire and manuals that will be subject to test in four countries are available;

- Workshop for training of trainers on methods for carrying out interviews to older adults; and
- Preparation of the data receipt and processing program.

The pilot study of the questionnaire will be carried out in July-August 1998 and the data collection work is planned between January-April 1999. Preliminary results are estimated to be available around July-August 1999.

*c) Multicenter Study Approved in 1998*

There was an internal project profile competition for the selection of the 1998 multicenter study. PAHO's various technical areas sent a total of nine project profiles from which the project: "Surveillance system based on syndromic diagnosis, for the early detection of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases: evaluation of its feasibility and sensitivity," was selected.

This is a multicenter study whose principal objective is to validate a sensitive, easy, fast, and attainable system for early detection of the emergence and reappearance of infectious diseases, with a view to orienting interventions. The system is to be implemented and evaluated in a one-year period by selected pilot health care units in Honduras, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Bolivia. Participating health workers will be trained to recognize the "uncommon infectious syndromes" through a predefined diagnosis algorithm. When comparing the "syndromes" reports with the laboratory results, the sensitivity, specificity, and predictive value of the algorithm of the proposed diagnosis will be calculated.

***Research competitions***

*a) Competition on Investment in Health and Economic Growth*

In 1997, it was decided to carry out a research competition to select the best project on "Investment and Economic Growth." A total of 17 proposals were received, of which 8 were pre-selected and evaluated by an *ad hoc* Committee formed by specialists on the subject. The Committee selected the joint proposal presented by FUNDESARROLLO of Colombia and CIDE/FUNSAUD of Mexico with the title: "Health, Growth, and Distribution in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Study of Regional and Local Determinants and Behavior."

The objective of this research is to study empirically the relationships between health and economic growth in the Latin American Region. The economic analysis of the interaction between health and growth is in a developing stage, especially in Latin America, although recent empirical literature confirms the existence of a positive correlation between health indicators and economic growth. The project attempts to analyze the empirical relationship between health and growth at the two geographical levels: the first one, the comparison of experiences

of the Latin American group of countries, and the second, the comparison among states (or departments) in Brazil, Colombia or Mexico.

These studies will allow the evaluation of the following aspects:

- Importance of the health situation in the process of economic growth;
- Impact of human capital in health on the yield rate and depreciation rate of human capital in general, that is, the impact of health in the profitability of investment in human capital;
- Impact of health expenditure (public and private) on health capital stock; and
- Relationship between health and income distribution.

*b) Research Competition "Comparative Analysis of Experiences on Health Sector Reforms: Promoting Better Health through Research on Equity Related Aspects"*

PAHO's Grants Program together with WHO and the "International Clearinghouse for Health System Reform Initiatives (ICHSRI)" is promoting a research competition to evaluate the impact of sectoral reform processes on the equity in health services access and coverage, analyzing, particularly, the impact on the most unprotected social sectors. A total of 30 letters of intent were received from researchers of the Region and 10 candidates were selected and invited to submit the complete proposals. They were invited to attend a workshop in July 1998. Final selection of the proposals will be conducted in October 1998, and the projects are estimated to start in 1999.

**9. Report on Results of the Multicenter Project on Violence Related Attitudes and Practices (ACTIVA)**

Dr. Pamela Orpinas, University of Georgia, presented the results of the ACTIVA study. She began referring to the fact that violence is one of the greater threats for public health and social security, and that only recently it has been seen through the eyes of public health. The lack of information and knowledge for clearly defining the problem and its determinants has been a serious limitation in developing the intervention to prevent violence in Latin America. Looking forward to overcoming this problem, PAHO promoted the ACTIVA study, which involves a comparative study of the cultural norms and attitudes related to aggressive behavior toward children, spouses and non-related persons, in different cities of the Region of the Americas and Spain.

Dr. Orpinas presented a literature review on the subject and on the conceptual bases of the multicenter study. In regard to methodology, the study consisted of a survey on a population sample between 18 and 70 years, living in the metropolitan areas of Rio de Janeiro and Salvador-Bahia, Brazil; Santiago, Chile;



Cali, Colombia; San José, Costa Rica; Madrid, Spain; San Salvador, El Salvador; and Caracas, Venezuela. A representative sample was selected by socioeconomic stratum in each city, using a procedure of multi-staged sampling with an average of 1,300 people interviewed by city from a total of 10,821. The selected variables, the questionnaire components, the scales applied, and the statistical analyses made were also presented.

Dr. Orpinas highlighted the fact that the nature of the study, a cross-sectional evaluation, does not allow establishing causal relationship between the attitudes and the aggressive behavior, but only the force of the association between them. Another limitation, characteristic of the domestic interview methodology, is the possible increase of socially advisable responses, for instance, the prevalence of aggressive behavior and the attitudes that support violence could have been insufficiently reported. Another element that may contribute to an artificially lower prevalence is that the refusal to participate is not casual and the most violent people may have less probabilities of participating in this type of survey.

Among the principal results and conclusions of the study, she pointed out:

- The prevalence of violence varied greatly by city, being higher in Cali, Salvador-Bahia and San Salvador, and lower in Madrid, Santiago, San José and Rio de Janeiro;
- A high prevalence of corporal punishment was observed, especially children stricken with some object. Violence against children was very common among the young uneducated women, who support the attitude that corporal punishment is a way of disciplining children. Those who also support dictatorship had a much greater prevalence of violence against children, which can be a reflection of the way they perceive family relations, with a “dictator” (the parents) and the children who should obey by force;
- Those that strike others were those who, with significantly more probability, carry a firearm or, if they do not have one, they would wish to carry a firearm. In some cities, those that also strike their spouse had more probability of wishing to have a firearm. Consequently, those who would like to carry firearms are not a random sample of the population, which indicates the importance of firearms control;
- The perception of low police efficiency was a predictive factor of violence against people alien to the family in the three cities with higher prevalence of violence: Cali, Salvador-Bahia and San Salvador. When people do not rely on the police system, or perceive that the police will not protect them, the probability of they taking justice in their own hands is greater. Confidence in the police system was not related to domestic violence.
- The people who reported aggression had smaller probability of knowing how to resolve conflicts without violence and the attitudes toward specific behaviors were also associated with aggressiveness. For example, the

attitude that it is correct to strike a child was associated with aggression toward the child and the attitude that it is correct to box the spouse was associated with aggression toward the spouse. The general sample explained one fifth of the variation of aggression toward people alien to the family, and somewhat less than the variation of violence against a family member. In view of the fact that violence is determined by multiple factors and that this sample evaluated only certain components, the percentage of explained variation is good.

Dr. Orpinas concluded her presentation pointing out that these results are especially promising in developing interventions to prevent violence. It is necessary to conduct additional studies in each country to describe more specific attitudes within each culture related to aggression. These attitudes and training in aptitude of alternatives to violence could be the goal of future prevention programs at individual scale. At a social level, the results indicate the need for stronger support to develop a good police system on which people can rely, and to increase support attitudes for the democratic system.

## **10. Closing Session**

### ***Words of the Director of PAHO/WHO, Dr. George Alleyne***

Dr. Alleyne stated his great satisfaction for the high level of the discussions and the richness of the recommendations. He promised to study in detail the possibilities to implement them and will inform the Committee, at their next meeting, on the progress achieved in this regard. He reiterated his conviction in the concept of Pan Americanism as a reference to how much can be accomplished when efforts are made jointly without any type of discrimination.

### ***Words of the ACHR Chairman, Dr. Carlos Morel***

Dr. Morel also stressed the high level of the discussions and the importance of all the topics treated, pointing out among others the VHL and the opportunity for approximation to the CONICITs. Referring to the rich discussion about research status in Venezuela, he mentioned the importance of continuing to dedicate a session of the ACHR meetings to analyze the situation of the host country, recommending that the possibility of including visits to national institutions be explored.

## **II. Discussions and Recommendations:**

### **1. Research Promotion and Development by the Councils of Science and Technology of Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Venezuela**

The members of the Committee emphasized the importance of certain common trends observed in the S&T in Health policies presented by the various Councils. Among these trends, the Committee stressed the importance being given to social demands as one of the basic reference axes of those policies, instead of taking into account exclusively the interests of the investigators as used to be the traditional trend. Other significant positive trends were the expansion of alliances with various actors, among them the private sector producer of goods and services. These alliances expand the impact of scientific output and help to consolidate real "S&T in health" systems. The Committee also emphasized the trend to generate networks of researchers to create evaluation systems for individual scientific output, to decentralize S&T activities in health, and to promote agreements for regional cooperation.

Despite the positive aspects of these trends, the Committee attracted attention to potential distortions, such as, the possibility of regressive subsidies represented by the socialization of research expenditures, and the privatization of profits derived from this research when alliances are made between the public and private sectors. Another concern refers to the process of defining priorities to attend to social demands, making possible in this process the imposition of interests by minority groups with great capacity for political mobilization. Another possible distortion is the attention to immediate demands and the abandonment of long-term prospect areas or lines of research. The systems of evaluating researchers' productivity may generate competitive relationships among them, hindering cooperative relationships and, in addition, generating excessive interest in publication at the expense of other activities such as education, promotion of results incorporation, etc.

Among the suggestions to diminish the possible negative aspects of the trends observed, the importance of maintaining a component of attention to spontaneous demand from the scientific community, together with modes of induction to research in given areas, was mentioned. The induced components should be strengthened with funds from the various sectors to be benefited from the research findings. In order to avoid regressive subsidies, the public sector should be capable to negotiate with national and transnational companies the aspects of intellectual property and industrial rights, with a view to protecting the public interest. The distortions fortuitously caused by the evaluation of performance based exclusively on the publication of articles in journals of great impact can be prevented if the incentive system is redefined by including incentives to other

activities such as transfer of results, education, etc. Finally, the Committee considers that many of the occasional contradictions between research responding to spontaneous demand and induced research actually represent a false dilemma. In most cases, it is possible to identify areas or lines of research that serve to expand the borders of knowledge as well as attend to social demands. The Region has successful program experiences in combining both objectives such as the programs for research on endemic diseases (PIDE).

## **2. PAHO/WHO Technical Cooperation in Scientific and Technical Health Information**

The Committee expressed great enthusiasm and support for the initiative to create the Virtual Health Library. It recognized the importance that, through this means, health science information of the Region may be collected and disseminated both at local and global levels to fulfill the information needs of a great diversity of users. The decentralized making of the VHL will be an important instrument of technical cooperation that will allow countries to dominate strategically important technologies and, at the same time, permit the production and dissemination of information of broad public interest. In addition to this recognition, members of the Committee asked questions and discussed various specific aspects related to the implementation of the VHL. Among these were a timetable for the implementation, the possibility of including information on DNA sequences and "gray" literature, the methodologies for impact assessment, and the mobilization of resources through subscriptions, grants, propaganda, etc.

## **3. Research in the Social Sciences and Health in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The Committee emphasized the importance of the social sciences in facing the complex health and health care problems of the countries of the Region which, to a great extent, are determined or conditioned by social variables. The scientific and humanistic tradition of these sciences make it possible to treat both the technical and scientific aspects of these problems as well as their ethical and cultural aspects.

Strengthening of the social sciences in the Region requires the definition of strategies toward:

- The CONICITs, so that, in their efforts to institutionalize science, they take into account the social sciences specific characteristics regarding control, evaluation, and financing mechanisms;
- The health professionals, so that they recognize that most of the variability in health problems is due to social variables;

- The social scientists, so that they recognize the importance of health as an applied field of the social sciences, a process already occurring in the case of health economy;
- The decision-makers, so that the dynamic of the decision-making process in health may be better understood and more effective transfer mechanisms may be defined.

The Committee recognized the importance of emphasizing the interface between research and the decision-making process as a privileged space of study and intervention development. It pointed out, however, that in addition to the scientific and technical aspects, the decision-maker in health increasingly needs ethical and cultural orienting elements to which the social sciences can also offer important contributions.

Given the importance of global or regional macro-processes in the determination of national and local health problems—particularly those regarding health inequities—the Committee recommends PAHO define a regional research agenda aimed to analyze these macro-processes. Due to the diversity of the countries involved, the Region of the Americas is privileged for that type of study.

#### **4. Health Research in Venezuela**

Several of the experiences presented reflect Venezuela's effort to develop a "complete cycle research", that is, to close the cycle research/production that will allow research to generate its own resources. The products generated through this process should have enough quality to compete in international markets, surpassing the false dilemma between world excellence research/development versus domestic interest research. Taking into account the importance of this strategic orientation, the members of the Committee emphasized the major problems that arise when university institutions are turned into centers of production. There have been several negative experiences in this regard in various countries of the Region. The problems indicated in the presentations are derived from this fact, since the Universities are not prepared for adopting business logic, lacking managerial and marketing experience, etc. The universities should devote themselves basically to research and development activities and should be trained in areas like intellectual rights, technological management, etc., in order to be able to negotiate advantageous transference contracts with the private sector. An alternative would be the technological parks and the incubator of companies. In the Region, some successful experiences of their implementation exist.

Regional integration appears as an important element of S&T in health policies, both for sharing experiences, and for the confrontation of regional problems that cannot be faced in isolation. However, resources for developing these type of activities cannot come only from international agencies. It is very important that the countries also commit themselves to allotting them. Fellowships

for foreigners offered by countries like Brazil and Mexico are a good example in this regard, as are the Andean epidemiological information network and the union of Amazon Universities. The cooperative development of the Virtual Library in Health and the Virtual University are other important elements of integration.

Both, in the presentations on health research in Venezuela and in the presentations of the CONICIT, important experiences related to human resources education were reported, as well as experiences in the definition of priorities, decentralization, incentive mechanisms for researchers, etc. The Committee recommends systematization of these experiences by PAHO, and promotes its dissemination to support definition of policies by those countries with relative smaller development in S&T in health.

## **5. Health Research in the 21st Century and the Role of WHO and PAHO**

The Committee recognized the importance of having a global health research agenda. It pointed out, however, that, without necessarily changing the structure of the agenda, problems such as poverty and inequity should be included among the problems of critical importance for global health due to their magnitude and trend toward growth, and their high ethical, social, and political importance. The agenda should be clearer in pointing out which are the global problems that, in a compulsory manner, should be resolved globally. For example, risk patterns are problems of great importance at local and national levels, but transference of those patterns as a consequence of globalization or tobacco world trade problems should necessarily be faced through a global effort.

The Committee does not consider that substituting the concept of priority for that of opportunity is the solution to avoid the rejection expressed by the scientific community when the priorities are defined arbitrarily or with little transparency. What is important is to make the criteria for definition of those priorities very explicit, and to put in clear terms what type of needs they respond to, who is responsible for establishing them, and which are the scientific evidence they are based on.

In regard to implementation of the agenda, the Committee acknowledges the constitution of networks as the appropriate strategy, considering it important that the participants are not ranked between those who offer problems and those who offer solutions. The already existing networks should be taken into account and it is very important that they have seeding resources to enable them to operate in generating projects and attracting additional resources. The strategies for mobilizing resources to implement the agenda should be better developed. The role of international agencies, particularly WHO and its regional offices, should also be better defined.

**6. Research Promotional Activities in some Technical Areas of PAHO/WHO: Health Systems and Services (HSP), Infectious Diseases (HCT), and Health and Environment (HEP)**

In regard to the Health Systems and Services presentation on research, the Committee recognized the important link between HSSR promotional activities and those of technical cooperation in the processes of sectoral reform. However, further to this instrumental dimension of the HSSR, the Committee emphasized the importance of preserving a space dedicated to knowledge advancement in this field and to maintain a support component for analytical and evaluative research to investigate the determinants, and impact of these reform processes. The HSSR promotional agenda should include studies on international/regional processes, and transnationalization of medical care, as well as comparative studies between countries.

The promotion of cooperative researcher networks is particularly important in this field, as is the integration among the various HSSR promotional initiatives in progress. In future meetings, the Committee should continue to be informed of progress in this field, including examples of research results and their impact.

In regard to the presentation on Communicable Diseases, the Committee expressed its great satisfaction for the significant achievements presented. It pointed out that, to a great extent, those achievements are due to the development of collaborative networks among researchers, to resource mobilization capabilities, and to the competence in establishing links between researchers and decision-makers. Several specific topics were debated such as the importance of the development of surveillance systems based on syndromes, formation of reference laboratory networks, etc.

In regard to the presentation on Environment and Health, the Committee also expressed its satisfaction with the important achievements, making sure that this success will not undergo continuity solution with the disappearance of ECO as a Pan American center. Although the number of research projects on policies may not have been expressive in comparison with other areas, support activities to the formulation of policies by transference of research results were quite significant. The activities for strengthening the ministries of health to enable them to lead the environment agenda should be continuous and reinforced. *Advocacy* activities through dissemination of results from successful experiences should also be continued.

## **7. Progress report on the Multicenter Projects and Research Competitions promoted by the PAHO/WHO Research Grants Program**

The Committee reiterated its support and recognized once more the importance of the changes introduced into the Research Grants Program. Passage from a reactive position of fragmentation and dispersion of resources among many small projects, to a pro-active position of concentrating these resources in projects on subjects of great importance for the public health of the Region has made it possible to increase the potential impact of the Program significantly.

A balance should be kept between analytical research and evaluation of interventions, as well as a balance between research in support of cooperation and cooperation in support of research. The criteria, for country selection in multi-center projects should be transparent.

The Research Grants Program can be an important instrument of support for a regional research agenda on problems of regional importance. Preparation and implementation of this agenda should be the focus of the efforts of researchers, CONICITs, MoHs, and other actors.

## **8. Report on Results of the Multicenter Project on Violence related Attitudes and Practices (ACTIVA)**

The Committee recognized the importance of the study and its results. The study has permitted, not only a better knowledge of the problem, but it has been useful in attracting attention to violence as something to be understood and studied, ceasing to be an exclusive police matter. It also served as an important instrument of resource mobilization by demonstrating the capacity of research in facing and proposing solutions to problems of great social importance. The project, in some countries such as Venezuela, has permitted an approach between researchers and various sectors, and it has served as a basis for the design of interventions at the level of health, education, police, and mass communication sectors.

Those achievements encourage continuation with this line of research. The adopted approach explains the problem partially. It must be complemented with other approaches that involve structural, environmental and cultural factors as well as organized violence as that related to drug trafficking, political violence, etc.

Some methodological limitations of the study were discussed, such as the cultural sensitivity of the instrument, that is, the problems derived from the use of a single instrument in very different cultural contexts to study phenomena strongly influenced by these same contexts. Recognizing that, for comparison purposes



often there is no other road than a forced “homogenization”, interpretation of some results should take these limitations into account.

## **9. Final Session**

The Committee approved this report, making some observations of form already incorporated.

In regard to the topics for the next meeting the Committee suggests:

- Progress in genetics and predictive medicine and its implications for the Region;
- Mobilization of financial resources for research as a subject of study and technical cooperation;
- Impact of intellectual rights legislation on health research in the Region: threats and opportunities;
- Report on the implementation of recommendations of this meeting

## **10. Summary of the principal recommendations**

*TO the CONICITs and other agencies responsible for the definition of health research policies:*

- In research promotion and support activities, the coexistence of induced modalities (competitions, multicenter projects, etc.) and the attention to the spontaneous demand of the scientific community should be maintained;
- To promote the training of public sector institutions in aspects of intellectual and industrial property rights, with a view to be able to protect the public interest in negotiations with national and transnational companies, particularly with respect to modalities of shared research funding;
- The performance evaluation of `investigators` should not be based exclusively on the publication of articles in journals of great impact, but should also include incentives to other activities such as the transfer of results, teaching, etc.
- In its efforts to institutionalize science, the CONICITs should take into account the particulars of the social sciences with respect to control, evaluation, and financing mechanisms;
- Do not promote university institutions be turned into production centers of the developments derived from their research when they are not prepared to adopt business logic. Promote that they be trained in areas such as intellectual property, technological management, etc., with a view to being

able to negotiate advantageous contracts to transfer its developments to companies;

- Commit resources for activities of regional integration that permit the sharing of experiences and the confrontation of problems of regional character that cannot be faced by the countries in isolation;

*TO PAHO:*

- PAHO should continue the important strides of implementation of the Virtual Health Library, promoting and supporting the decentralization of the same in order to make it possible that the countries of the Region master important strategic technologies;
- Promote the systematic study of the relationship between research and the decision-making process in health, as well as the ethical and cultural implications of health policies;
- Do not create committees or other advisory agencies to support the development of specific disciplines, but concentrate efforts on the study of problems of an interdisciplinary nature;
- Define a regional health research agenda on subjects related to the impact of macro-economic, social, and political processes on health, of a global or regional nature that must be faced by a regional collaborative effort. The ACHR should play an important role in the preparation and implementation of this agenda, together with the scientific community, the CONICITs, the ministries of health, and other actors. In addition, the Research Grants Program should be an important support instrument for the implementation of such an agenda;
- Systematize experiences of the CONICITs related to human resource education, definition of priorities, decentralization, incentive mechanisms for investigators, etc. and promote the dissemination of these experiences with a view to supporting the definition of policies on the part of countries with smaller relative development concerning S&T in health;
- Research in Health Systems and Services supported by PAHO, in addition to instruments for the implementation of the processes of sectoral reform, should also envisage analytical and evaluative research that tries to investigate the determinants, conditioning factors, and impact of these processes;
- PAHO should continue and increase the cooperation activities that attempt to strengthen the capacity of the ministries of health in the area of environment and health. In addition, due to the importance of this area, the “advocacy” activities should be continued through the dissemination of results of successful experiences;
- The Research Grants Program should continue with its current modalities of action, which are responsible for a significant increase in the impact of the Program. A balance should be maintained between analytical research and evaluation of interventions, as well as between research in

support of cooperation and cooperation in support of research. The country inclusion criteria in the multicenter projects should be transparent and firm;

- Regardless of the importance of the multicenter study on violence, the conceptual and methodological approach adopted partially explains the problem, complemented with other approaches that account for structural, environmental, and cultural factors, in addition to organized violence related to drug trafficking, political violence, etc.;
- Strengthen training activities in human resources, by supporting post-graduates in the Region and establishing a fellowship fund to promote the exchange of young researchers. The creation of this regional fellowship fund should be promoted by PAHO to be funded with resources from the CONICITs;
- Explore opportunities that make it possible to tighten the joint efforts of the CONICITs, PAHO, and the ministries of health;

*TO WHO and Global ACHR:*

- With regard to the Global Research Agenda in support of the new strategies of health for all, poverty and inequity should be included among the problems of critical importance for health at the global level due to their magnitude and growing incidence, as well as its high ethical, social, and political importance, and
- In regard to the implementation of the agenda, the constitution of networks is the correct strategy, as long as the participants of the same do not pose problems but instead offer solutions. The already existing networks should be taken into account and should have seed resources in order to generate projects and attract additional resources. The role of international agencies, particularly the WHO and regional offices, should be better defined.

# **A N E X O S**



PAHO/ACHR/98.01

VERSION 6

Original: Spanish

## ***XXXIII ACHR***

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*Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Health Research  
of the Pan American Health Organization  
1 to 3 June 1998  
Caracas, Venezuela*

### **AGENDA**



Research Coordination  
Division of Health and Human Development  
Pan American Health Organization  
*Pan American Sanitary Bureau • Regional Office of the*  
World Health Organization  
Washington, D.C.  
1998



## AGENDA

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**Monday, 1 June**

Doc. No.

09:00 - 09:30

### **INAUGURAL SESSION**

Opening Remarks by the Director of the Pan  
American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO)

**Dr. George A. O. Alleyne**

Opening Remarks by the President of the PAHO/WHO  
Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR)

**Dr. Carlos Morel**

Opening Remarks by the Vice-President of the National Council  
on Scientific and Technological Research (CONICIT) of Venezuela

**Dr. Claudio Bifano**

Opening Remarks by the Minister of Health and Social Action  
of Venezuela

**Dr. José Félix Oletta**

9:30 - 9:40

Presentation of the Agenda by the ACHR Secretary

**Dr. Alberto Pellegrini Filho, HDP/HDR**

9:40 - 10:30

Promotion and Development of Research within Science  
and Technology Councils

**Dr. José Ubyrajara Alves, CNPq, Brazil**

**Dr. Albanita Viana de Oliveira, CNPq, Brazil**

**Dr. Rodrigo Zeledón Araya, CONICIT, Costa Rica**

**Dr. Jaime Martuscelli Quintana, CONACYT, Mexico**

**Dr. Claudio Bifano, CONICIT, Venezuela**

98.04

10:30 - 10:45

Recess

10:45 - 12:00

Continuation

12:00 - 14:00

Recess



		<u>Doc. No.</u>
14:00 - 15:30	Technical Cooperation in Scientific-Technical Information in Health <b>Dr. Abel Packer</b> , BIREME	98.07
15:30 - 15:45	Recess	
15:45 - 17:00	Research in the Social Sciences and Health <b>Dr. Elssy Bonilla Castro</b> , ACHR member	98.11

**Tuesday, 2 June**

9:00 - 10:30	Health Research in Venezuela <i>Speaker:</i> <b>Dr. José Félix Oletta</b> , Minister of Health and Social Assistance, Venezuela  <i>Panel:</i> <b>Dr. Egido Romano</b> , IVIC <b>Dr. Francisco Araoz</b> , INH <b>Dr. Oscar Noya</b> , Malarial Laboratory, IMT <b>Dr. María Esperanza Martínez</b> , CONICIT <b>Dr. María Cristina de Prisco</b> , UCV <b>Dr. Graciela Pantin</b> , Polar Foundation	
10:30 - 10:45	Recess	
10:45 - 12:00	Continuation	
12:00 - 14:00	Recess	
14:00 - 15:30	Research in Health in the Twenty-First Century and the Role of WHO and PAHO <b>Dr. Fliedner</b> , Chairman, Global ACHR	98.13
15:30 - 15:45	Recess	

Doc. No.

15:45 - 17:00	Promotion of Research Activities in Two PAHO Technical Areas:	
	Control of Infectious Diseases <b>Dr. Gabriel Schmunis</b> , HCP/HCT	98.06
	Health and the Environment <b>Dr. Luiz A. Galvão</b> , HEP/HEQ	98.05

**Wednesday, 3 June**

9:00 - 9:45	Report on the Results of the Multicenter Project on Violence (Project ACTIVA) <b>Dr. Pamela Orpinas</b> , University of Georgia	98.08
9:45 - 10:30	Progress Report on Multicenter Projects <b>Dr. Rebecca de los Ríos</b> , HDP/HDR	98.10
10:30 - 10:45	Recess	
10:45 - 11:15	Health Systems and Services Research <b>Dr. Daniel López-Acuña</b> , D, HSP	98.12
11:15 - 12:00	Presentation and Discussion of Final Report	
12:00 - 12:15	<b>CLOSING SESSION</b>	
	Remarks by ACHR Chairman <b>Dr. Carlos Morel</b>	
	Remarks by PAHO Director <b>Dr. George A. O. Alleyne</b>	

PAHO/ACHR/98.02

Original: Spanish

# **XXXIII ACHR**

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*Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Health Research  
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## **LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**



Research Coordination  
Division of Health and Human Development  
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*Pan American Sanitary Bureau • Regional Office of the*  
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Washington, D.C.  
1998

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**XXXIII ACHR – PROVISIONAL LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Author</b>
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98.03	Provisional List of Documents	ACHR Secretariat
98.04	Promotion and Development of Research Within CONACYT/MEXICO	Dr. Jaime Martuscelli, CONACYT, Mexico
98.05	PAHO's Research Activities in Health and the Environment	Dr. Luiz A. Galvão, PAHO
98.06	PAHO's Research Activities in the Control of Infectious Diseases	Dr. Gabriel Schmunis, PAHO
98.07	Technical Cooperation in Scientific-Technical Cooperation in Health	Dr. Abel Packer, BIREME
98.08	Report on the Results of the Multicenter Project on Violence (Project ACTIVA)	Dr. Pamela Orpinas, Univ. of Georgia
98.09	Report of the Thirty-fifth Session of the WHO Advisory Committee on Health Research	Global ACHR
98.10	Progress Report on Multicenter Projects	Dr. Rebecca de los Ríos, PAHO
98.11	Research in the Social Sciences and Health	Dr. Roberto Briceño-León, Dr. Mario Bronfman, Dr. Elssy Bonilla Castro ACHR Members
98.12	Health Systems and Services Research	Dr. Daniel López-Acuña, PAHO
98.13	Health Research in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century: Transparencias	Prof. T. M. Fliedner, Chair, Global ACHR