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PROGRAM FOR THE SUPPORT OF TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN THE HEALTH SCIENCES

I. Causes of failure at the outset of an academic career

In recent years there has been a distinct increase in the interest of Member Governments in strengthening educational institutions for the training of health personnel. This increased interest is due to the increasingly sharper awareness of the need to make education and research part of overall health planning.

The Pan American Sanitary Bureau has cooperated with the countries in these efforts, which explains the expansion of pertinent supporting activities. To cite a single example, the number of fellowships for the training of teachers of medicine and related subjects has risen from 25 in 1958 to 205 in 1967. There is no doubt that programs of this kind are of considerable benefit to educational institutions in Latin America.

Nevertheless, it is frequently observed that the opportunity to undergo advanced training is no guarantee of improved achievement and performance.

The poor performance of personnel that have already received basic training and their failure to adapt to their own institution are not uncommon and result in the migration of professional personnel, transfers to other fields of activity, very partial dedication to their work, full time dedication to their work but poor performance including concentration on unimportant activities, conversion of work into a routine, and isolation from the mainstream of technical and scientific advance.

This state of affairs has all too frequently led not only to a failure to make use of the initial training opportunity but also to the loss of a promising vocation for teaching or research.

To overcome these difficulties the Milbank Memorial Fund, basing itself on the above-mentioned considerations, initiated in 1964 the so-called "Fellowship Program for the Support of Teaching in the Social and Preventive Aspects of Medicine". So far the results obtained have been

excellent. However, in accordance with its policy of carrying out pilot programs, the Fund will, from next year, cease to award further fellowships, in the hope that other institutions will continue the work it has begun.

This document discusses this project and indicates how the Pan American Health Organization can take over, with suitable modifications, a program which has given excellent results and has been filling a serious but little noticed need.

The evaluation of the fellowship program, which is the subject of another working document, attempts to pinpoint the reasons for the poor performance of the personnel trained. So far, no definitive and conclusive information is available; however, incomplete data collected in an earlier appraisal show that between  $1/3$  and  $1/2$  of those interviewed have not been able to make full use of what they have learned, the reasons being, in the following decreasing order of importance: lack of human, material and financial resources. Two-thirds of the supervisors are of the opinion that fellowship holders have not acquired the necessary knowledge to do their job on their return home.

If we examine the cases individually, we find that certain institutional failures, common in many countries, appear to be the most frequent decisive causes of poor performance or the loss of the teacher or the research worker.

In the first place, there are many institutions which, because of a sometimes temporary lack of funds, or for other reasons, are unable to provide their staff with a salary which allows them to be free of economic worries and completely devote themselves to their work. Because of this they are forced to supplement their incomes by taking on outside jobs or to seek employment with another institution, frequently abroad, where they are better paid.

A second, very common cause for poor performance is lack of supplies and equipment. This is obviously serious in the case of personnel who need special laboratory equipment for their work; however, a shortage of basic office supplies is not infrequent, and the lack of them can impair the performance of a professional worker and frustrate him in his work.

It is not unusual for highly qualified personnel to have to spend much of their time and effort on simple routine tasks because of lack of auxiliary personnel to do them. Many efforts are fruitless because of the lack of a research assistant, a laboratory technician, or simply of a typist.

In the career of a research worker the first steps are the most critical. It is extremely difficult for him to obtain financial support for his work when he still has no contribution to show. On the other hand, after the first success, even if modest, as it usually is, not only new lines of research but various sources of financing open up to him. It is

impossible to know how many research careers have been smothered at birth by lack of initial aid which was granted not in consideration of the work done, which a person who is only beginning cannot show, but of the qualities which he possesses and which point to a promising future.

The scientist needs to be in a challenging setting where he can establish relations with colleagues, exchange ideas, and share experiences. He must keep abreast of new developments in his own field and keep his knowledge up to date. Pioneers in any field rarely find these conditions in their own country. It is therefore essential for them to be able to attend scientific meetings and activities abroad and, in general, to share their ideas and experiences with persons with similar ideas and, if possible, with different cultural backgrounds. Otherwise they will remain aside from the main currents of scientific thought, lag behind and be deprived of the stimulus and spirit of renewal that marks certain academic settings.

## II. Initial support of teachers and research workers

In the light of the foregoing considerations, it is clear that, to ensure that they will be successful in their future activities, it is not enough to provide teachers or research workers with an opportunity for good initial training. Frequently, it will be necessary, in view of the conditions existing in Latin American countries, to help them to establish themselves and to begin work in their own institutions. To ensure that assistance of this kind produces the results expected of it, it must be:

- a) sufficient
- b) flexible
- c) enduring

The project being studied has those purposes in mind and seeks to overcome the difficulties which have led to many young and promising personnel not being made use of in institutions. Fundamentally it seeks to help a selected group of teachers and research workers to get established and to further their development within their own institutions.

## III. Individual and institutional conditions

The purpose of the support program described below in some detail is to overcome the above-mentioned deficiencies. It can only be successful to the extent that both the beneficiary and his institution are receptive to it.

In the first place, the candidate must have certain qualities which point to a promising future in teaching or research. Although difficult to define and to evaluate, those qualities are known. They include intellectual capacity, dedication, critical turn of mind, administrative ability, proper attitude to teaching, intellectual honesty, altruism, lack of interest in making money, and many others which together constitute the potentiality of the individual as a teacher or a research worker.

It is not the purpose of the proposed program to provide the candidate with basic training since other programs and fellowships are available for that purpose, but to enable him to improve himself. Candidates for this type of assistance must therefore have already completed their basic training in fields considered priorities. Since he will still be developing and in a formative stage, the candidate will be a young person and his academic, administrative and professional level will not be very high. It will, therefore, be necessary to fix certain age limits and prescribe a certain educational level as requirements for this type of assistance.

A very important point is the priority to be assigned to the various fields in which the assistance must be given. These priority areas are none other than those which the Governments have indicated to the Bureau on many occasions in the past.

Of equal importance are the conditions to be met by the institution in which the beneficiary of the program has become established. Although the proposed assistance seeks to make good certain deficiencies in institutions, these deficiencies must be purely temporary since the assistance will itself be temporary. Subsequently the institution will have to assume full responsibility for its obligations. The institution must therefore have the potential capacity for the development and the proper utilization of its personnel. This potential takes the form of an atmosphere favorable to teaching and scientific work, of stimulating and stable conditions, of opportunities for teaching, innovating, and introducing constructive changes, of the influence it can exert on the community and of its contribution to general development.

#### IV. Selection of candidates

Special attention must be given to the selection of candidates for these programs. If the necessarily limited funds available are to be fully employed, selection must be strict, scrupulous, and free of all extraneous influences.

The recommendation of candidates must therefore come solely from the institution concerned, and the award of a fellowship must not compete with other programs at the country level. To guarantee impartiality and soundness of judgement, a competent, independent, highly qualified group must be appointed to appraise and select candidates.

After a pre-selection based on documentary evidence, it will be necessary to appraise the candidate, study his past performance, and assess his possible future development, investigate and determine his personal and professional qualifications, and ascertain his limitations. It will also be essential to appraise the institution, ascertain the attitudes of its chiefs and supervisors, and assess its possibilities for stable and productive activity. For that reason it will be necessary to make a detailed visit to the candidate in his institution and to obtain much more vivid, direct and personal information and therefore much more accurate

information than that which can be obtained from a document, no matter how complete it may be.

V. Use of support

From the foregoing it is not difficult to deduce the areas to which the funds intended for a project of this nature can be devoted. Assuming that it will have to be highly flexible in order to deal with each case on its merits, support might be provided in the following main fields:

- a) A supplement to the candidate's salary to enable him to devote himself whole-time to his academic activity. Ideally, this element should progressively decrease and gradually be absorbed by the institution.
- b) A contribution towards the wages of assistants.
- c) The purchase of basic working equipment.
- d) Other expenditures which may be necessary to initiate the research project.
- e) Attendance at courses, scientific meetings, and other activities in his country or abroad.
- f) The purchase of books.
- g) Opportunities to receive guidance and orientation, to contact authorities in his field, and to get to know other cultures.

VI. Amount, duration and number

It is difficult to estimate how big and how long a project of this type should be. The very promising experience in this field of the Milbank Memorial Fund makes it advisable, initially, to keep to the limits provided in the program sponsored by it; that is to say, assistance for not more than five years to each beneficiary in the maximum amount of US\$40,000 to be paid during that period. In other words, an average of US\$8,000 per year per beneficiary. The amount proposed may be compared with the actual cost of an academic fellowship, which has been calculated at US\$6,600 when the place of study is in Latin America, and US\$8,000 when it is in the United States or in Canada. The funds for the proposed program would come from the money assigned to the fellowship program, since it supplements and strengthens it.

It should be a highly selective, demanding program. Therefore, the number of beneficiaries will necessarily be small. Five beneficiaries a year, although a small number, might over the years exert an extremely important influence on institutions in the region.

The funds needed for this project from 1969 onwards, according to the above-mentioned figures, would be as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of beneficiaries</u>		<u>Cost of program</u>
	<u>New</u>	<u>Total</u>	
1969	5	5	\$ 40,000
1970	5	10	80,000
1971	5	15	120,000
1972	5	20	160,000
1973	5	25	200,000
onwards			

From the fifth year onwards the cost of the program would be US\$200,000 a year or 8% of the funds assigned to medical education programs in 1968.

#### VII. Evaluation

This type of program needs to be continually evaluated in order to ensure that the assistance provided is producing the expected benefit. As each beneficiary will receive assistance for several years, formal evaluations will need to be made at regular intervals, not only to make sure that the benefits are being obtained, but also to plan future assistance on a sound basis. The foregoing will be without prejudice to the information which will be obtained from progress reports on the work done and the examination of the budget estimates submitted for approval.

The system of evaluation being designed should strive to ensure not only that individual programs are carried out in such a way as to reach their objectives, but also that the program as a whole is adjusted whenever necessary.