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INFORME DE LA REUNION SOBRE POLITICAS DE INVESTIGACION
EN SALUD EN EL AREA II

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Pan American Health Organization

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SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE
PAHO ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON MEDICAL RESEARCH

Lima, Perú
2-6 May 1978

REPORT OF THE MEETING ON HEALTH RESEARCH
POLICIES IN AREA II

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REPORT OF THE MEETING ON HEALTH RESEARCH

POLICIES IN AREA II

Hotel La Mansión, San Juan del Río

Querétaro State, Mexico

4-6 November 1977

Ref. HRR 16/2

November 1977

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REPORT OF THE MEETING ON HEALTH RESEARCH POLICIES

IN AREA II

The Meeting on Health Research Policies was held in the Hotel La Mansión
San Juan del Río, Querétaro State, Mexico, from 4 to 6

November 1977

INTRODUCTION

In compliance with the recommendations of the Ten-Year Health Plan the Pan American Health Organization has launched a series of activities to promote the formulation of policies on health research in the Member Countries and to study requests for cooperation from the countries in the development of such policies.

It was agreed that top-level representatives of the countries would form study groups corresponding to the PAHO operational areas in the Hemisphere, and that these groups would hold a series of meetings to address this important problem.

The first of these meetings was held in Mexico, in the State of Queretaro, and was attended by representatives of the central governments and health agencies, research councils, committees and institutes, and centers of higher learning of the Area II Member Countries, which are Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Haiti. Representatives of Colombia and Peru attended as observers.

The meeting was coordinated at the local level by the National Council on Science and Technology of Mexico. PAHO provided the technical secretariat.

The meeting addressed itself to the following agenda:

1. Analysis of the current status of health research in the Area II countries.
2. Formulation of recommendations by each participating country toward the elaboration of policies on health research.
 - Identification of priority lines and programs.
 - Structure. Organization.
 - Evaluation and dissemination of results.
 - Financing.
 - a) On the level of state health institutions.
 - b) On the level of private agencies.
 - c) On the government level.
3. Ethical aspects of research.
4. The training of human resources for research.
5. The role of PAHO/WHO in relation to research policies in Member Countries.

Each topic was first covered in statements presented by the several participating countries, followed by discussion in plenary. The following account covers the salient points on which agreement was reached in the meeting, but a better understanding of the problems presented can only be acquired by reading the documents prepared by the countries, and which are listed at the end of this report.

FINAL REPORT

The delegations were of the view that research was of basic importance to the attainment of higher levels of health and that, therefore, it was a need and by no means a luxury. It was even more important in less developed

countries, for research could give them a better understanding of their own situation and help them make better use of their resources.

The orientation of health research should be given by the national policies on health and on science and technology, on the basis of which a National Plan should be formulated and periodically reviewed for adjustment to changing health requirements. This Plan should take account of needs in the health field, the general development of science and the particular characteristics of each country and the degree of its socioeconomic development, and the various sectors concerned should have a hand in its formulation.

Bearing in mind that the findings of research could contribute to the improvement of health, the delegations recommended to the Governments that they take cognizance of its usefulness and provide more funds for it.

DIAGNOSIS IN THE FIELD OF HEALTH RESEARCH

The reports presented by the countries revealed an uneven situation in respect of health research in the Area, which made any overall diagnosis impossible at this time. This situation was caused by the differing organizational structure of the health services, the socioeconomic structure of the countries, the availability of human and financial resources for research, and the degree of understanding of the health problems confronted.

Because of the foregoing, it was found recommendable to carry out a study using a standardized methodology that would afford a comparative assessment of health research in the countries of the Area. If this study was to attain its object, the governments, the sectoral health agencies, the centers of higher education and the entire national scientific community would have to participate broadly in it.

ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT

It was felt that a national policy should be established for health research, that it was the responsibility of the Government to formulate it, and that a central body (a research committee or council) should be set up to do this. This body would have to have the authority to orient, promote, analyze, finance and establish the strategy, assessment and prognosis of health research. It would have to evaluate the results of such research and promote its dissemination and application. Also, it would coordinate all the institutions in the country engaging in health research and promote their improvement and the training of the requisite human resources. It would keep strict control of all research conducted in the country by groups, institutions and agencies of other countries.

This body would also be responsible for implementation of the national policy when formulated, which would entail the active participation of the scientific community through its prominent representatives.

HEALTH RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

Service and research institutions

On this level it was regarded as necessary that an institutional policy be formulated for the attainment of general objectives based on the national policy. An organizational and scientific-technical structure would be needed that would permit the promotion, organization, and methodological guidance of research, and monitor and evaluate its findings. Moreover, interdisciplinary groups would have to be set up in these institutions for the problems to be researched.

Centers of higher education

Research in centers of higher education performed two chief functions: on the one hand, they contributed to the country's harmonious development by promoting the scientific and technical upgrading of the teaching staff, raising the quality of instruction, and thereby improving the quality of their graduates.

It was regarded as fundamental to promote the development of research in these centers, because in our countries it was they that contained much of the qualified manpower of our countries and offered the best conditions for the conduct of basic research. The presence of staffs of specialists in different fields of knowledge was favorable to the multi-disciplinary approach, which was deemed recommendable, as was the conduct of extramural research in order to foster direct contact with the real situations and needs of the country.

The participation of teaching staff in the research process was becoming part and parcel of higher education and should be made compulsory, and teaching and research needed to be regarded as a single unit. It was also felt that every center of higher education should promote the involvement of students in research as an important part of the training process, which helped make it more comprehensive.

The conduct of educational research in health was a function of centers of higher education. This research should aim for a major improvement in the effectiveness of the teaching process. Educational research should become a compulsory line of inquiry in those institutions.

In view of all the foregoing, it was essential that centers of higher education (institutes and universities) be given ample financial support by government authorities.

Private institutions

In some countries there were private institutions that subsidized different research projects. Only a few of these institutions conducted research, the results of which ordinarily benefited them directly even when carried on in government institutions.

It was agreed that the Government should orient the research of these private groups to fit them into the National Health Research Plan.

TRAINING OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN RESEARCH

The need of adequate numbers of properly trained research workers, to constitute significant study groups, was identified as a problem common to the countries.

It was deemed essential that there be constant exchanges among research workers so that they might help solve each other's problems.

The active participation of students in research programs from the early phases of the educational process might, it was felt, yield professional people with a grounding in scientific methodology who could eventually become research workers in the health field.

It was also felt that teaching programs should be responsive to national requirements as stated in the National Health Research Plan. This necessitated the coordination and integration of human resource training units with service establishments.

It was noted that it was necessary to train middle-level technicians, if not exclusively for research then at least in adequate numbers for this field of science.

ETHICAL ASPECTS OF HEALTH RESEARCH

The delegations felt that ethical standards were needed for health research. The concept of ethics in research had to be interpreted broadly, that is, be applied the health field as a whole, and not merely to the doctor-patient relationship. One important aspect was the human being as guinea pig.

There was recognition of the importance that all countries had committees at the national and the institutional levels to oversee compliance with established ethical standards.

ROLE OF PAHO/WHO

The role of PAHO/WHO was discussed in connection with the promotion of health research and the adoption of national policies against the background of the recommendations in the Ten-Year Health Plan for the Americas and of those made by PAHO and WHO technical groups and advisory committees on research.

There was emphasis on the new technical cooperation policy of the international agencies which, unlike the earlier technical assistance, aimed at preparing the developing countries to help themselves and promoted cooperation among countries with common problems. In this connection the delegates noted that PAHO/WHO needed a consultative body on research policy made up of representatives of the units incharge the matter on the country level.

The delegations cited the important role that PAHO could play in the promotion and conduct of research on health services and the training of research workers in this field.

The meeting was presented with a study that PAHO/WHO was conducting with the collaboration of the countries on the impact of research in the health field. The aim of this study was to make an inventory of human and financial resources and to construct indicators of scientific activity. The delegations recognized the importance of the study and voiced their full support for the attainment of its objectives.

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