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HEALTH RESEARCH IN THE UNIVERSITY

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## HEALTH RESEARCH IN THE UNIVERSITY

In response to a proposal to promote broader participation by the university in efforts to attain the goal of HFA-2000, presented to last year's meeting of the Advisory Committee on Health Research, this Committee suggested a study to make on the status of health research in the universities of the Region.

As a prelude to this study, the available information was reviewed, and enough documentation covering the last four years was found to make a preliminary characterization of the present situation.

1. A preliminary view is afforded by the study done by Juan C. Garcia, who in 1982 reviewed 3,338 health research projects in 11 countries of the Region, of which 73% were concentrated in Chile, Colombia and Peru, and the remaining 27% were spread among Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. Most of the projects were carried out in universities (63%) and many of the remaining studies were conducted in other public agencies (32%), leaving a very small number of projects (5%) conducted by establishments outside both institutional settings.

University research remains predominant whichever the field, as can be seen from the following table:

	Basic	Clinical	Public Health
University	73%	56%	53%
Governmental	22%	40%	39%
Other	5%	4%	8%

It was found that 44% of the professionals conducting that research were physicians, 8% chemists and biologists, 6% dentists, and 4% microbiologists, veterinarians and biochemists. Of the professionals not specifically concerned with the health area, 3% were social scientists, 3% engineers, and 1% educators.

2. In Mexico, which was not covered by the study in question, Lopez Acuña recently made, with PAHO support, a survey of a sample of 128 institutions, of which 28 were attached to universities.

The proportions of the scientific activities in each field found to be conducted in a university setting are as follows:

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FIELD	% CONDUCTED IN UNIVERSITIES
Biomedical research	48
Clinical research	27
Public health research	25
Management of knowledge	40
Technological development	45

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This research resolved into the following proportions in relation to the Organization's program categories:

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HEALTH SERVICES INFRASTRUCTURE-----	26%
Health systems development-----	10%
Manpower development-----	16%
HEALTH PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT-----	40%
HEALTH PROTECTION AND PROMOTION-----	22%
ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION-----	6%
TECHNOLOGY, DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT-----	6%
TOTAL	100%

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These findings not only convey the importance of the university's contribution to the conduct of health research, but also bring out an order of priorities that reflects academic interest in the promotion of basic and biomedical research rather than research in connection with public health.

Particularly in the field of health systems development, to which pertain most of the priorities of the "University and Health for All" program, the research effort has been very limited so far, accounting for about 10% of the projects found.

3. Lastly, it has been possible to study the rankings of the countries that have made the greatest research effort in a specific area. This was done by considering the distribution of projects financed throughout the Region by WHO's Program of Research in Tropical Diseases (TRD), which in 1984 and 1985 awarded US\$4,678,679 in the Americas.

Projects approved in universities in the United States (37%), Brazil (18%), Cuba (9%), Colombia (8%), Chile (7.5%), and Argentina (5%) add up to 84% of all projects carried out, the remaining 26% being distributed among Bolivia, Canada, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Venezuela.

The share of the universities in the total of TDR projects approved in each country brought out the great predominance of academic research, as shown in the following table:

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RESEARCH PROJECTS CARRIED OUT IN UNIVERSITIES AS % OF TOTAL APPROVED IN THE COUNTRY	
CUBA	100%
CHILE	100%
EUA	88%
PERU	88%
CANADA	87%
COLOMBIA	70%
BRASIL	55%
VENEZUELA	46%
ARGENTINA	35%
OTROS	51%
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A V E R A G E	68%

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These findings confirmed the university's potential for generating knowledge in the health area but at the same time bring out two limiting factors, the first being that this effort is confined essentially to university divisions concerned with the health professions, and the second that it is confined almost exclusively to the traditional fields of biomedical and epidemiological research.

As yet only incipient efforts are being made to integrate into an interdisciplinary context social, economic and political aspects that other departments of the university can contribute to the solution of major health sector problems toward attainment of the goal of HFA-2000 in view of the limitation on funding imposed by the economic crisis.

With recognition of this situation and at the recommendation of the ACHR it has become possible to provide in the present budgetary year for extension of the inquiry to cover the countries less regarded in the previous studies, and to focus on their more developed universities, and in them on departments not directly concerned with the health sector.

Initially, selected universities in Argentina and Brazil will be visited, to be followed in a second stage by Chile, Colombia and Peru, and finally a return to Mexico, where the most recent study was done, and whose coverage we would endeavor to expand.

In these countries we will try to obtain information in the universities themselves, and from the national research councils of the Health Ministries and social security institutions.

This study will not only provide better guidance in the acquisition of knowledge of the situation, but also help to promote a more meaningful effort in the field of research for health development.

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