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### RESEARCH POLICY AND PROGRAM OF THE PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION

The past four years have witnessed the expansion and intensification of the research program of the Pan American Health Organization, which had its beginnings in the establishment of the Office of Research Coordination, at the end of 1961, and the appointment of a 15 member PAHO Advisory Committee on Medical Research (PAHO/ACMR). The role of the Office, which was initially supported by a planning grant from the National Institutes of Health of the United States Public Health Service, was recognized as fundamental to the promotion of research and steps were therefore taken in 1964 to ensure continuity by including its financing in the PAHO Regular Budget.

The main thrust of the program has been the stimulation of those fields of biomedical research and research training that are related to the objectives of the Organization. Within the guidelines provided on a periodic basis by the PAHO/ACMR and the recommendations of consultants, the Office of Research Coordination has implemented the Organization's policy: (a) by identifying research problems and opportunities, particular emphasis having been placed on projects susceptible to multicountry collaborative effort; and (b) by exploring the possibilities of obtaining financial support for research projects meeting the standards prescribed by granting agencies.

These efforts have resulted in the stimulation of a series of research projects in such broad fields as nutrition, communicable diseases, zoonoses, environmental health, and scientific communication, and in specific areas such as endemic goiter, nutritional anemias, epidemic typhus, plague, schistosomiasis, arboviruses, Chagas' disease, population genetics, dental health, radiation hazards, and, recently, in public health research policy at the national level.

To accelerate those research programs which call for the standardization of methodology, reagents, techniques, and the training of research personnel, the Organization has established four reference laboratories and training centers. Research in immunology, in nutritional anemias, in endemic goiter and in Chagas' disease has been considerably aided by the facilities provided by the PAHO/WHO Immunology Research and Training Center, in São Paulo, Brazil; by the PAHO/WHO Reference Laboratory and Training Center for Applied Research in Nutritional Anemias in Caracas, Venezuela; by the PAHO Reference Laboratory and Training Center for Iodine Determinations in Endemic Goiter Research in Santiago; and lastly,

by the Center for the Production and Control of Antigens for the Laboratory Diagnosis of Chagas' Disease, also in Santiago, Chile.

At each of the annual meetings of the PAHO/ACMR, beginning with the second, a Special Session has been devoted to the discussion of a topic selected by the Committee because of its particular relevance to existing and emerging health problems that need to be explored. A full day is set aside for the evaluation of a single field of scientific endeavor by a specially selected international panel of experts, whose conclusions and recommendations will facilitate future action in public health. Four areas of inquiry have been analytically and critically reviewed: In 1963, in appraising the research needs in tuberculosis, the Committee found that "whereas knowledge concerning the epidemiology, immunology and chemotherapy of the disease is so precise that highly effective methods of prevention and treatment can be devised, there are a number of difficulties in the way of the practical application of these methods that limit their usefulness, especially in population groups of low economic status". This evaluative review identified three areas that offer opportunities for research namely, chemotherapy, vaccination, and nutrition, and indicated study problems in each of them.

The following year, the Special Session focused on the issues posed by the development of "shanty towns", on the difficulties of providing their inhabitants with even minimal living standards, and on the problems of the adaptation of rural populations to urban environment or, perhaps, of adapting that environment to communities of rural origin; and defined the ecological, social, organizational and economic factors influencing the success or failure of efforts to improve conditions. The proceedings of this session were published as PAHO Scientific Publication No 123, "Environmental Determinants of Community Well-Being".

In 1965, those factors in deprivation which are known or likely to influence mental development and intellectual functions were discussed by a distinguished group of scientists and by the Committee in the context of newer concepts of the molecular and neuro-cellular processes of coding and information storage. Although opportunities for studying deprivation problems at the molecular-cellular level are available everywhere, the Committee indicated that "there exist in Latin America circumstances deriving from special social and cultural conditions which are unique and which make possible studies of the effect of these factors on psychobiological development in man. These include mass cultural studies to delineate crucial dimensions of deprivation and critical ages at which these can occur; ways in which deprivation is or is not associated with maternal or parental care; and policies and methodologies of nutrition as these relate to health and child care." The papers and discussions of this special session have been recorded in PAHO Scientific Publication No 134, "Deprivation in Psychobiological Development."

The most recent Special Session which was held on June 15 of this year, with Dr. Alberto Hurtado as moderator, dealt with "Life at High

Altitudes", a subject of considerable scientific interest, particularly for Latin America, where several million people live at elevations of over 3,000 meters. Under such environmental conditions man is known to develop adaptive mechanisms whose patterns are markedly different from those found at sea level. In addition to the state of chronic hypoxia induced by the low partial pressures of oxygen in the inspired air, the populations of these areas are characterized by marked differences in incidence and manifestations of certain diseases which are of clinical and public health importance. The Committee examined these aspects in the light of recently acquired knowledge and pinpointed the areas for further research and the opportunities for additional studies in Latin America. (Scientific Publication No 140).

For the meeting in 1967 the PAHO/ACMR requested that the Special Session be held on the subject of "Immunological Aspects of Parasitic Infections" to review current status of research and to explore those aspects of the subject about which more knowledge is needed. The focus of the session will be on two of the diseases of priority importance in the Western Hemisphere namely, Chagas' disease and schistosomiasis. In addition, the Committee selected the subject of drug resistance in malaria to be presented in extenso at the same meeting with specific reference to the urgent need for further research in Latin America.

At the recommendation of the Committee, a Study Group was convened in 1964 to examine national policies for biomedical research in the Americas. The purpose of the inquiry -as outlined in the study design- "was not to examine the state of research itself -that is, the areas of investigation or the relative strengths of various fields- but rather to study the general conditions under which research is conducted, the factors in various countries that tend to promote or retard research or to influence the field of investigations, the formal organizations for research, and the attitudes of governments toward research. The study was directed toward biomedical research but the nature of science is such that it was not possible or desirable to confine it to that field alone." The report of the Study Group has now been published and distributed as "Science Policy in Latin America: Substance, Structure and Processes" (Scientific Publication No 119).

In 1965 the Committee considered the desirability of an analysis of the factors operating in the international migration of scientists, in particular the problems faced by many Latin American countries as a consequence of manpower losses through migration of trained health personnel. Of special significance are the qualitative aspects of this movement where losses of scientific leaders occur whose potentialities for developing fields of biomedical science in Latin America have not been fully realized. A Subcommittee on Migration was constituted late last year to study the factors involved in this migration and to make pertinent recommendations. The preliminary report of the Subcommittee was presented by a group of consultants to the Fifth Meeting of the PAHO/ACMR on June 13 of this year. In its report to the Director

(Document RES 5/19) the Committee agreed that it was not desirable to reduce migration by increasing the restrictions already existing but that a most rewarding approach may lie in improving the working conditions for biomedical scientists in Latin America. A number of specific recommendations were given designed to moderate the heavy drainage of trained manpower from Latin America.

In order to obtain a panoramic view of the Organization's research program, it was deemed desirable to prepare for the PAHO/ACMR detailed summary reports of each of the 90 research projects stimulated, coordinated or financially assisted by PAHO since 1961. Such a compilation has been issued in Document RES 5/8.

At the end of a four year period of operation, it would appear that it might be timely to consider an examination of the stability, equilibrium and direction of the PAHO research program and to consider methods by which increased support of research projects of critical importance to the health of the Americas might be financed in accordance with priorities as indicated by the health needs of the Americas.

Annex