

strategic approaches and directions for specific health promotion actions;

- identification by participants of a series of steps that countries could take to sustain interest in health promotion.

A special evening session on the topic of "Media and Health" was open to the public as well as conference participants. It featured a panel discussion between representatives of the health sector and the media, who exchanged views on opportunities for a stronger partnership between their respective fields. Despite differences between the panels on specific points, the conferees found much common ground, as reflected in the charter's identification of the media as a participant and valuable partner in health promotion.

The conference concluded with a ceremony at which Sir George Alleyne, Assistant Director of PAHO, formally presented a draft version of the charter, which had been developed by an editorial committee on the basis of the working group discussions and synthesis in plenary session. According to the charter, the achievement of optimal health levels by the people of the Caribbean area depends upon the following strategies: formulating health public policy; reorienting health services; empowering communities to achieve well-being; creating supportive environments; increasing personal health skills; and building alliances, with special emphasis on the media. The media participants at the conference, who were involved in drawing up the charter, were highly supportive of it and committed themselves to helping achieve its goals and objectives.

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Development of Molecular Epidemiology in Mexico

Molecular epidemiology is a field that has recently emerged from the integration of molecular biology into traditional epidemiologic research. It focuses on the role of molecular-level genetic and environmental risk factors in the etiology, distribution, and prevention of disease. The objectives of molecular epidemiology are quite broad: (1) descriptive and analytical studies to evaluate host/environment interactions in disease; (2) the development of strategies for the control of bacteria, parasitic, and viral disorders through molecular diagnosis; and (3) the prevention of noncommunicable diseases and genetic disorders by assessing risk

and identifying susceptible individuals through genetic screening.

So far, few countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have developed activities in this field, owing to a lack of trained molecular epidemiologists and a shortage of appropriate equipment, reagents, and supplies. To help countries acquire the necessary capabilities in this field, an International Molecular Epidemiology (IME) Task Force has recently been established by Dr. Janice S. Dorman, Co-Director of the WHO Collaborating Center for Diabetes Registries, Research, and Training at the University of Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania). Its mission is to facilitate the de-

velopment and implementation of programs in molecular epidemiology in all regions of the world and to promote advanced biotechnology transfer for scientific research as well as its integration into medicine and public health. Each participating country is establishing a national scientific committee that includes government advisers who interact with international members of the task force and direct the molecular epidemiology program for their country. This structure assures that activities related to the development of molecular epidemiology are integrated with other national health programs and lead to the establishment of appropriate health policy.

On 27 July 1993, the first meeting of the Mexican National Scientific Committee and government advisers for the IME Task Force was hosted by the PAHO/WHO Representative's Office in Mexico City. At that time, plans were made to develop a national program for molecular epidemiology in Mexico. This initiative is supported by the Secretary of Health and includes the following components: (1) short courses or workshops in molecular epidemiology, (2) a formal graduate training program in molecular epidemiology, (3) the development of molecular technology at centers actively collaborating with epidemiologists, and (4) a session on molecular epidemiology at the V National Congress of Public Health, held in Cuernavaca in January 1994. Additional activities targeted toward specific infectious and noncommunicable diseases will be considered in the near future.

Mexico is the first country in Latin America to initiate a national program in molecular epidemiology, although parallel activities are currently being planned for Argentina and other countries in the Region. This effort will be facilitated by the Pan American Health Organization. It complements the Organization's Strategic Orientations and Program Priorities for the Quadrennium 1991-1994 in that

it seeks to develop approaches to control and/or eliminate diseases, enhance technological development, and increase the competence of human resources in the public health field. The program will further strengthen Mexico's infrastructure with regard to scientific expertise, biotechnology, epidemiology, and international collaboration.

The following persons constitute the Mexican Scientific Committee: chair—Dr. Clara Gorodezky; members—Dr. Francisco Alvarado, Dr. Edmundo Calva, Dr. Roberto Cedillo Rivera, Dr. Alejandro García Carrancá, Dr. Patricio Gariglio, Dr. José Ignacio Santos, Dr. Francisco López Antuñano, Dr. Adolfo Martínez Palomo, Dr. Esther Orozco, Dr. Guadalupe Ortega, Dr. Arturo Panduro, Dr. Lourival Possani, Dr. Fabio Salamanca, Dr. Joaquín Sánchez Castillo. The government advisers are Dr. Jesús Kumate Rodríguez, Dr. Jaime Sepúlveda Amor, Dr. Roberto Tapia Conyer, Dr. José Luis Valdespino Gómez, Dr. Mauricio Hernández, and Dr. Carlos Santos Borgoa. The PAHO advisers are Dr. Juan Manuel Sotelo Figueiredo and Dr. Luis Cabrera Coello.

While public health efforts must continue to focus on improving social and economic conditions and providing education and health care to underserved populations, the goal of "health for all by the year 2000" can also be aided by the transfer of advanced biotechnology. The evolution of molecular epidemiology in Mexico represents a new vision for public health and a contribution to the attainment of this goal.

Further information on this initiative can be obtained from Dr. Janice S. Dorman, Director for Molecular Epidemiology, WHO Collaborating Center for Diabetes Registries, Research, and Training, University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, Department of Epidemiology, 3460 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, USA; telefax (412) 692-8329.