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SUMMARY OF THE DOCUMENT:
MEDICAL RESEARCH ISSUES AND UNIVERSITY
LINKAGES IN CANADA

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MEDICAL RESEARCH ISSUES AND UNIVERSITY LINKAGES IN CANADA

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(Summary of a talk to be given at the XXV Meeting of the
PAHO Advisory Committee on Health Research, April 22, 1986)

Health research in Canada is supported from the following sources: the Medical Research Council - 50%; other Federal government sources, principally the National Health Research Development Program (NHRDP) of the Department of National Health and Welfare - 7%; Voluntary agencies - 24%; Provincial governments - 17%; and Foreign agencies - 2%.

The Medical Research Council of Canada (MRC) is a Crown Corporation established by Parliament in 1969 to promote, assist and undertake basic, applied and clinical research in Canada in the health sciences and to advise the Minister of National Health and Welfare about health research. The MRC reports to Parliament through the Minister of National Health and Welfare. The Council has a full-time President, who is also the Chief Executive Officer, and 21 other members representing the scientific and lay community. There are an Executive Committee; Standing Committees to assist the Council in formulating policies and procedures for ethics in experimentation, priorities and planning, public affairs, research funding and research personnel; and some 35 committees made up of scientists who review applications for research projects and personnel support. A Secretariat located in Ottawa provides general services to the Council and all of its Committees.

The MRC has no laboratories of its own. Its responsibilities are to support research and research training in health sciences in universities, affiliated hospitals and institutes. The investigators supported by the MRC are on the staff of schools of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and veterinary medicine and in other health science departments or schools such as psychology and nursing. The research supported by the MRC involves study of the structure, function and environment of man and other organisms in health and disease. The Council also supports clinical trials of the efficacy and effectiveness of measures of potential value for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease. Finally, the MRC will consider projects on methods of education of health professionals and on the history of health sciences.

The Council has Grant Programs and Salary Support Programs. Under the former are Operating Grants which support research activities by individuals working alone or in collaboration with others; Major Equipment Grants; and Maintenance Grants for the operating support and maintenance of facilities shared by several investigators within an institution or region. Other grants include those for MRC Groups which are considered to be centres of excellence for research and training in what are deemed to be especially important and productive areas; Program Grants which support a program involving closely integrated research activities carried out by three or more investigators; Development Grants which provide special support to schools where the level of research activity needs to be enhanced; Subject Research Development Grants to stimulate research in specific areas; Biotechnology Research Development Grants to encourage research on the application of this technology to health problems; and General Research Grants to Deans of Medical, Dental, Pharmacy and Veterinary Schools for the promotion of research.

The Personnel Support Programs include the Salary Support and Research Training Programs. Within the former there is support for highly qualified scientists at different stages of their careers: the Scholarship program which provides five years of support to allow those who have recently completed their formal research training an opportunity to demonstrate an ability to carry out independent research; the Scientist program which gives five years of support to exceptional candidates who have had four to eight years of experience as independent investigators in university positions; and the Research Associate program which enables institutions to recruit outstanding senior investigators.

The Research Training Programs offer support to highly qualified candidates seeking research training in the health sciences: Fellowships for those with an M.D., D.D.S., D.V.M. or Ph.D. degree, and Studentships for those undertaking training leading to an M.Sc. or Ph.D. degree. The Council also offers Undergraduate Research Scholarships to encourage an interest in research among undergraduates in Canadian schools of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy.

A number of important issues and challenges are presently being explored by appropriate committees of Council. These include the establishment of Special Research Institutes and Units in various parts of the country with support from both government and industry; the development of a program in Tropical Disease Research to be carried out both in Canada and in developing countries with joint support from the MRC and Canadian international agencies such as IDRC and CIDA; the fostering of clinical investigation including that done by nurses; and the preparation of a major revision of the 1978 document on Ethics in Experimentation by the MRC Standing Committee for this area.