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CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY  
WHO EXPERT COMMITTEE ON VITAL AND HEALTH STATISTICS  
REGARDING NATIONAL COMMITTEES ON VITAL AND HEALTH STATISTICS

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Expert Committee Meeting, 23 - 28 May 1949

The committee, after discussing at length this important subject, unanimously agreed on the following resolution:

The Expert Committee on Health Statistics, considering

- (1) that the International Conference for the Sixth Decennial Revision of the International Lists of Diseases and Causes of Death, held in Paris from 26 to 30 April 1948, strongly recommended that the various governments of the world establish national committees on vital and health statistics and that the study of some of the many statistical problems in the field of health be decentralized to them;
- (2) that the WHO World Health Assembly, held in Geneva during July 1948, endorsed this recommendation and that the World Health Organization subsequently requested the Member Governments to create such committees;
- (3) that several nations have responded to this request and have set up national committees, and that a number of other nations are now in the process of organizing national committees or equivalent bodies;
- (4) that these national committees are expected to report their findings and recommendations, from time to time, to the WHO Expert Committee on Health Statistics for international consideration, clearance of national viewpoints and coordination with the interested statistical services of other inter-governmental organizations";

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) that WHO renew its effort, through normal channels, to foster the creation of national committees to suit their particular needs in the field of medical and public-health statistics;
- (2) that WHO issue an informative document setting forth the motives and background for the establishment of national committees on vital and health statistics, emphasizing their objectives, suggesting problems which might need solution, and reporting on the present status of those national committees already organized;

- (3) that this document be amply supplied to governments for distribution to interested national organizations, and supplied also to those national committees (or their equivalents) already in operation;
- (4) that a focal unit for maintaining relationship with national committees (or their equivalents) be established in the WHO Secretariat, this to include:
  - (a) an exchange service for national committees, reporting on their work and supplying information which might be of value to them,
  - and
  - (b) a consulting staff adequately provided with funds for travel and other necessary expenses so as to enable them to assist national committees in their programmes, this staff to include not only WHO officers, but also specially qualified consultants who will assist such a national committee, other than their own, which may ask for their help - the duration and the character of this aid and the methods to be followed shall be established by agreement between WHO and the interested parties;
- (5) that WHO should initiate an international conference of representatives of national committees to be sent at the expense of their respective governments, this meeting to be held early in 1952.

Expert Committee Meeting, 18 - 21 April 1950<sup>1)</sup>

The committee adopted the following resolutions:

I The Expert Committee on Health Statistics,

Considering that, pursuant to the recommendations of the Expert Committee on Health Statistics, adopted at its first session, several nations have now organized national committees on vital and health statistics,

RECOMMENDS strongly an early implementation of the resolution adopted by the Second Health Assembly concerning the establishment of a focal unit for maintaining relationship with national committees (or other national equivalents).

II The Expert Committee on Health Statistics

RECOMMENDS that WHO take steps to initiate an international conference of representatives of national committees, to be sent at the expense of their respective governments; this meeting to be held early in 1952.

Expert Committee Meeting, 21 - 29 November 1951<sup>1)</sup>

I.5 In the course of discussions on various sources of morbidity statistics, the wide variety of methods employed in different countries to collect and analyse morbidity data became apparent.

The committee recognized that this diversity of procedures was hindering the international comparability of morbidity statistics. It considered, therefore, that if substantial improvement in this field were to be achieved this could be best obtained through the closest contact and exchange of information and views among the various national agencies responsible for the collection and analysis of morbidity data.

It was the view of the committee that from the national standpoint the national committees on vital and health statistics, or their equivalents, constitute the best means whereby this close international co-operation could be achieved. The committee considered it desirable that steps be taken to enlarge the number of national committees on vital and health statistics and to bring about a fuller exchange of information among them.

The committee recognized that there were a number of basic problems in connection with morbidity statistics requiring urgent preparatory study and considered that these problems could best be studied by small groups of national committees on vital and health statistics working in close co-operation.

In view of the above considerations,

The Expert Committee on Health Statistics

1. ENDORSES the recommendation of the first session of the Expert Committee on Health Statistics relating to the setting-up of national committees on vital and health statistics;
2. ENDORSES the recommendation of the second session of the Expert Committee on Health Statistics relating to the convening of an international conference of representatives of national committees on vital and health statistics, or their equivalents, to be sent at the expense of their respective governments;
3. NOTES that it has not been possible to prepare for such a conference to be held in 1952; and

4. RECOMMENDS

- (1) that such a conference be convened early in 1953;
- (2) that this conference should consider, inter alia:
  - (a) morbidity definitions of a general nature, definitions of hospital terminology, and definitions of various rates of morbidity;
  - (b) adaptations and selected lists from the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries, and Causes of Death.

II.4 The committee reviewed with great interest the substantial progress which has been made in the organization of national committees on vital and health statistics throughout the world and noted the wide variety of the subject-matter with which they are working. It feels that already this type of mechanism is beginning to pass from an experimental into a more permanent phase and that the national committees are becoming an increasingly powerful factor for the development of vital and health statistics.

In view of this growth and diverse development it is becoming more and more important that the pattern of national committees be reassessed. Consequently,

The Expert Committee on Health Statistics

RECOMMENDS that the proposed international conference of national committees on vital and health statistics should be convened under the auspices of the World Health Organization early in 1953, if possible, and that this conference should include, as a major element on its agenda, a review of the objectives, organizational patterns, programmes, and working relationships of national committees with each other and with international agencies. Such a review should lead to the establishment by the conference of a set of guiding principles for these various bodies in their mutual interrelationships and thus bring about their maximum effectiveness for the solution of the international statistical problems in which they are jointly concerned.

Expert Committee Meeting, 10 - 14 December 1956<sup>1)</sup>

The establishment of national committees on vital and health statistics was recommended at the Conference for the Sixth Revision of the International Lists of Diseases and Causes of Death (Paris, 1948); this recommendation was endorsed by the First World Health Assembly. The main purpose of these committees is to facilitate the exchange of information and views between the various national agencies responsible for the collection and analysis of vital and health statistics and their objectives were defined at the First International Conference of National Committees (London, 1953)<sup>2)</sup> as:

- (a) To help in assessing the needs for vital and health statistics, in evaluating the degrees to which the needs are met, and in providing vital and health records and statistics satisfactory and useful to the individuals and groups who use such records and statistics.
- (b) To help to achieve essential uniformity in records, methods, and tabulations for the production of the minimum core of comparable vital and health statistics needed for national or international purposes.
- (c) To ensure a free flow of information and exchange of views, so that the needs and preferences of procedures and users of vital and health records and statistics, at all levels, are given full expression and receive due consideration.
- (d) To relate the activities and functions of diverse agencies or organizations that produce statistics, so that they work as a co-ordinated whole, avoiding both wasteful overlapping of effort and important gaps in essential aspects of statistical data.
- (e) To make vital and health statistics of greater practical use and appeal.
- (f) To stimulate needed statistical studies by those persons or groups best able to undertake them.
- (g) To stimulate the training and supply of an adequate number of skilled workers in the field of vital and health statistics, and to encourage the interest of the medical profession in the value of the statistical approach to their problems.

(h) To assist when desirable or necessary in the implementation of international recommendations in this field.

The Committee took cognizance of recent developments concerning national committees, expressed its satisfaction that 33 national committees have so far been established, and endorsed previous recommendations on this subject to the effect that countries which have not yet established a national committee or equivalent body should consider the desirability of doing so. Furthermore,

I. The Expert Committee on Health Statistics,

Considering that the National Committees on Vital and Health Statistics or their equivalents are among the best means of studying the variety of problems arising in the rapidly expanding field of morbidity statistics and of securing international comparability of data.

~~RECOMMENDS~~ that the World Health Organization continue its effort to foster the establishment of such committees, and at the same time expand the exchange of information between those already established.

II. The Expert Committee on Health Statistics

Taking into account that problems involved in the collection of health statistics vary with local conditions: availability of medical personnel, administrative machinery, as well as local customs, etc.;

Realizing that these problems could be more usefully discussed on a regional or inter-regional basis between specialists from countries presenting comparable conditions than on a world-wide basis.

~~RECOMMENDS~~ that regional or inter-regional conferences should be held periodically, with the technical co-operation of WHO Headquarters and pertinent regional offices and the active participation of National Committees in the area.

Expert Committee Meeting, 29 September - 4 October 1958<sup>1)</sup>

The Expert Committee took note of the activities of national committees on vital and health statistics since its previous session. It recognized the importance of the work being carried out by national committees in a large number of countries, the stimulus that these committees gave to the development



of health statistics, both in their own national sphere and internationally, and the important amount of information that was being exchanged between national committees on vital and health statistics through the Liaison Centre in the WHO Secretariat. As a further step in exchanging information between national committees on vital and health statistics, the Committee urged that from time to time the WHO Secretariat should issue collated reports of work carried out by national committees, summarizing the position that had been reached internationally in various health statistics fields. The Committee expressed concern at the fact that some national committees had not reported on their work during a number of years, that only 35 countries had so far established a national committee on vital and health statistics and that the increase in this number over the last two years had been only two, while the World Health Organization now comprises eighty-eight Member and Associate Member States. The Committee emphasized the advantages of the existence of a national committee to undertake the function of making an appraisal of the health statistics programme of the country in order to bring to the attention of national authorities concerned the existence of gaps and suggestions for improvements. The support of national committees is often an important element in securing resources for implementing health statistics programmes.

The Expert Committee stressed that national committees on vital and health statistics should be urged to keep the World Health Organization regularly, and at least annually, informed of their activities.

National committees should be requested to submit to WHO a statement of how far they had succeeded, and what difficulties they had encountered, in implementing the recommendations of the First World Health Assembly and the Sixth Revision Conference concerning the national and international functions of national committees on vital and health statistics.

The Committee also discusses the usefulness of convening international conferences of national committees on vital and health statistics. It was generally felt that such meetings should preferably be on a regional rather than on a world basis.