

**WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION**



**ORGANISATION MONDIALE
DE LA SANTÉ**

**Regional Office
for the Eastern Mediterranean**

**ADDRESS BY DR A.H. TABA
DIRECTOR
WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

to the

WHO REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

ALEXANDRIA, 6 to 8 APRIL 1976

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you today as members of the WHO Regional Advisory Committee on Biomedical Research. This Committee has been formed as a result of a proposal by the WHO Advisory Committee on Medical Research, supported by resolutions of the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board (WHA 27.61 and EB55.R35), for the greater involvement of the Regional Offices in the research activities in their regions. The RACMR at present consists of twelve scientists, your goodselves, selected from the scientific community in the Region, on the basis of merit, while maintaining, as far as practicable, a judicious mixture of different disciplines and a balanced geographical distribution. Membership might vary and be increased as required.

As you are aware, this Regional Office has in fact been involved in medical research since the first Group Meeting held in Alexandria in February 1966, by assisting and promoting medical and health research in the Region, as deemed appropriate and feasible. This has been done mainly through: (a) assistance to all Schools of Public Health, most medical schools and other health institutions in the Region; (b) the Regional Visiting Scientists programme; (c) establishment of regional advisory panels; (d) designation of regional collaborating centres; and (e) a number of studies which were undertaken in WHO-assisted projects in the Region dealing with subjects such as epidemiological features of certain prevalent diseases, treatment procedures, approaches to disease control, and health care delivery.

However, today marks a milestone in that it provides a unique opportunity for your distinguished group to recommend a programme of research relevant to the specific needs of countries of this particular Region, enabling us to follow and implement a plan of work towards further promotion of health research within the region, to the benefit of all concerned.

The first step will be to define the aims and the areas of the research programme, and then to develop the strategy for these aims. In the light of the strategy, the appropriate management system would then have to be designed. As I mentioned, the immediate and medium-term aim should be to promote the type of research in countries that would be most appropriate for their needs; the long-term aims would be to develop and co-ordinate this with activities elsewhere in the Region or outside it.

At the country level, the strategy to be adopted should lead to the immediate involvement of countries and governments in identifying their priorities for research and in developing mechanisms to manage this research. Significant gaps in basic knowledge which require attention will become more and more obvious as different countries of the Region become aware of one another's biomedical research programmes. An exchange of knowledge between countries should also indicate areas of research that might help in dealing with national health problems. The more complete such an exchange, the more would the objectives and priorities of the research programmes comply with the economic realities and socio-economic goals of the individual countries.

One can safely say that until very recently the Organization's activities were largely focussed on the urgent problem of establishing technical principles and policies in selected biomedical fields and disciplines (e. g. biomedical standards, microbiology, immunology, cancer, communicable diseases, and nutrition) that would be of worldwide service.

Therefore, change of emphasis in research is needed to preserve the ability of the Organization to meet the problems created by this rapidly developing and changing Region of ours.

The challenges now facing our Region could be briefly summarized as follows:

- To cover untouched or neglected fields of research within the priority programme areas of WHO, such as the delivery of health services, educational techniques and other aspects of manpower development and training, and certain aspects of disease prevention and control (e.g. tropical diseases, mental disorders, environmental health). A careful selection of problems for attack must be made, based on relative importance and the extent to which they are likely to be solved.
- To develop potential and assist promote existing research resources (manpower and institutions) involving a much more active participation of Member States.
- To identify the reservoir of research institutions, national scientific research councils, and scientists in developed and developing countries alike and to collaborate with them in the development of WHO's technical activities. The resources available could be amplified many times by exploiting the Organization's collaborative mechanisms.
- To develop mechanisms for the rapid and efficient application to particular local conditions of existing knowledge as well as of new scientific knowledge as it emerges.
- To assist operational research and a much more effective exchange of information on biomedical research.
- To adapt approaches and solutions relevant to the political and socio-economic situations in different countries.

The RACMR can assist WHO in all above areas. In addition, it can be very useful in identifying sources of extra-budgetary funds within the Region to support research of special regional interest. It can also promote the organization of regional technical working groups, panels and meetings, and can identify those research centres where collaborative research on priority problems could be undertaken.

In conclusion, I should like to mention the responsibility that all of us will henceforth share with regard to the promotion and conduct of medical research in this Region. This responsibility is a heavy one, in view of the disproportionate balance between the enormity of problems and the scarcity of our resources. I am, however, sure that your discussions during this meeting and the resulting recommendations will go a long way towards ensuring that our regional research programme will give the optimal results.