

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
Regional Office
for the Eastern Mediterranean
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTE
Bureau regional de la Mediterranee orientale



مَنْظَرُ الصِّحَّةِ الْعَالَمِيَّةِ
الكتب الإقليمي
لشرق البحر المتوسط

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

EM/RC40/9
May 1993

Fortieth Session

ORIGINAL: ARABIC

Agenda item 11

**REPORT ON PROGRESS OF WHO-SPONSORED
RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN THE EMR**

**REPORT ON PROGRESS OF WHO-SPONSORED
RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN THE EMR
(1 July 1991 to 30 June 1993)**

(Agenda item 11)

Appreciating the role of health systems research (HSR) in decision-making and solving health problems, the activities of the Research Promotion and Development programme in the last two years were directed towards furthering HSR in the Region, in accordance with the objectives of the programme and the recommendations of the Eastern Mediterranean/Advisory Committee on Health Research (EM/ACHR). These activities included the following.

Intercountry meetings

The Fifth Intercountry Meeting of National Officers Responsible for Health Research was held in Muscat, Oman, in September 1991. Its main recommendations were that:

- HSR structures should be established in ministries of health where they do not exist, and strengthened where they already exist;
- team work and the multi-disciplinary nature of HSR should be developed; and
- a coordinating body for HSR should be established in each country.

A specialized intercountry meeting was held in Cairo, Egypt, in June 1992, to discuss cooperation between universities and ministries of health in health systems research. Its main recommendations were:

- a partnership should be established between the universities, health ministries and the private sector;
- a sustainable organizational structure is needed to achieve optimal intersectoral coordination (i.e., establishment of a multisectional health research council, or body; and
- the use of national languages is to be encouraged in teaching and implementation of HSR.

An intercountry workshop on HSR, at the provincial and district levels, was held in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, 27-29 October 1992. Its main recommendations were to:

- encourage decentralization of the research process and development of mechanisms to promote peripheral HSR; and
- develop appropriate training schemes for this purpose.

These three intercountry meetings brought together more than 60 managers, researchers and academicians who will, it is hoped, act as focal points for HSR in their countries.

Research grants and research training grants

To stimulate research activity, various methods were adopted to increase research activity and research projects (e.g., through deployment of consultants or development of proposals during intercountry meetings). During this period, 25 research grants were supported (5 biomedical, 6 field, 9 HSR, 5 nutrition) at a total cost of US\$307 840. It is gratifying to note the increased trend towards HSR.

Research promotion and development (RPD) activities in the countries

The two RPD/HSR programmes in the Region help to support national workshops, training courses, recruitment of consultants, and fellowships in research management and methodology.

Participation of RPD in research meetings

On behalf of EMRO, the Regional Adviser, RPD, participated in five research meetings and workshops that were concerned with promotion of research activities and development of research proposals in 1991 and eight meetings in 1992.

Research activity in other programmes

The Regional Adviser, RPD, participated in meetings and workshops organized by Human Resources for Health (HRH), GPA/EMRO, and MCH to further the cause of research. One HRH meeting discussed research in the area of human resources for health, and the other discussed research on distant learning. The meeting on AIDS developed research protocols in epidemiology, laboratory and sociocultural aspects of the disease. The MCH meeting set priorities for research in the areas of safe motherhood, maternal and child mortality and sociocultural aspects of contraceptive technology relevant to the Region. It also stressed the role of HSR in MCH programmes, which indicates the increased interest in HSR in various EMRO programmes.

EMRO/Tropical Disease Research/Control of Tropical Disease Research Grants

This innovative joint WHO/EMRO-WHO/HQ programme has been strongly supported by the Regional Director. Through this system, financially-supported by TDR and EMRO, small grants for research, amounting to approximately US\$10 000 per project were provided to nine research proposals on leishmaniasis. Out of a total of 31 research proposals received in 1992, five were supported and four were developed further, all on the topic of leishmaniasis. Similar arrangements were made for the support of research on schistosomiasis.

Visits of the Task Force on Health Research to Morocco and Tunisia (17-28 February 1992)

The Task Force visited both Maghrebian countries owing to similar conditions in the area of health research. In both countries biomedical

research has a long tradition going back to the early part of this century, when Pasteur Institutes were established in cooperation with the mother institute in Paris. This tradition of cooperation in biomedical research with institutions in France and other French-speaking countries such as Belgium, Canada and Switzerland, still continues and plays an important role in research promotion.

Ministries of public health (MOPH) in both countries have realized the necessity of promoting HSR, especially for developing primary health care services and solving other problems. The MOPH in Morocco designated the National Institute of Health Administration as a focal point for development of HSR and for training in related methodology. Furthermore, HSR and epidemiological research have been included in the five-year plan for health development.

In Tunisia, the focal point for HSR is the MOPH's Centre for Research and Training in Pedagogy. Some research projects have been carried out in cooperation with WHO.

The Task Force supports the MOPH's policy and efforts to develop HSR, and considers that further development of health research would be greatly augmented by:

- setting up a directorate, or unit, on research in the MOPH, to develop, encourage and coordinate research in various institutions and to disseminate the results; and
- further strengthening of the institutions already designated as focal points for HSR.

WHO collaborating centres

More scientific institutes are being designated as WHO collaborating centres in the Region.

Seven new WHO collaborating centres were designated in 1992, and five existing centres were redesignated. This indicates the great interest shown by Member States in this activity.

Meeting of the Eastern Mediterranean Advisory Committee on Health Research

The seventeenth session of the Eastern Mediterranean Advisory Committee on Health Research, Aleppo, Syrian Arab Republic, 10-12 April 1993, recommended EMRO's Research Promotion and Development programme, but thought that the programme should be accelerated in the future, especially in promoting HSR through advocacy and extended training programmes, in cooperation with the health services in the Member States.

The Committee supported fully the recommendations of the three meetings below:

- Fifth Intercountry Meeting of National Officers Responsible for Health Research (Muscat, Oman, September 1991);

- Specialized Intercountry Meeting to Discuss Cooperation between Universities and Ministries of Health in HSR (Cairo, Egypt, June 1992);
- Intercountry Workshop on HSR at Provincial and District Levels (Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, October 1992).

Although the Committee was satisfied with the new format of the *Eastern Mediterranean Region Health Services Journal*, it believed that more efforts were needed to provide health information services to research workers and to improve the flow of information within and among countries.

Three topics were discussed as technical papers in the last meeting of the Eastern Mediterranean Advisory Committee on Health Research: diseases of modern life-styles (cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes); health aspects of human ecology (including health of immigrants, refugees, displaced populations, etc.); and health of adolescents. These topics were selected owing to the increasing morbidity and significance of certain health problems in the Region.

Member States are invited to review the present situation of these diseases by gathering accurate data on their prevalence in their countries, including underlying risk factors.

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Summary of Recommendations

1. Health systems research (HSR) structures should be established or strengthened within ministries of health. Mechanisms for strengthening coordination and collaboration between HSR structures and planning and health information structures should be reinforced within ministries of health.
2. Policy- and decision-makers at the ministry level need to be oriented to HSR concepts and to the importance of HSR for strengthening health care and for solving some of the practical, day-to-day problems faced by health-care managers.
3. Mechanisms should be established for continuity in HSR and utilization of research findings.
4. A research coordinating body should be established in each country to ensure that there is no duplication of research activities.
5. HSR should be decentralized, preferably to the district level and the periphery.

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REPORT ON THE PROGRESS OF WHO-SPONSORED
RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN THE EMR

Summary for the Report

In view of the importance of health systems research (HSR) in decision-making and solving of health problems, the activities of the regional programme of Research Promotion and Development during the past two years were directed towards furthering HSR in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, in accordance with the objectives of the programme and the recommendations of the Eastern Mediterranean Advisory Committee on Health Research. These activities included intercountry meetings, the provision of research grants and research training grants, visits by the Task Force on Health Research to countries of the Region, and cooperation with WHO collaborating centres.

During 1991 and 1992, various meetings on HSR were held in the Region. These included the fifth intercountry meeting of national officers responsible for health research, an intercountry meeting on cooperation between universities and ministries of health in HSR, and a regional workshop on HSR at provincial and district levels. These three meetings brought together more than 60 managers, researchers and academicians who could act as prime movers for HSR in their countries.

In addition, 25 research grants (five for biomedical research, six for field research, nine for HSR, and five for research on nutrition), amounting to US\$307 840, were awarded.

Small grants totalling US\$100 000, were provided for operative, control-oriented research in tropical diseases. Leishmaniasis was chosen as the first topic for such a grant in 1992, and this was followed by another grant for schistosomiasis research during 1993.

The Task Force on Health Research visited Morocco and Tunisia in 1992.

More institutions of scientific excellence in the Region are now recognized as WHO collaborating centres, an evidence of the interest shown by Member States in research.

The following three topics, selected on the basis of the increasing concern with which they are viewed in the Region, were discussed at the last meeting of the Eastern Mediterranean Advisory Committee on Health Research in 1992:

- Diseases of modern life-styles (cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes).
- Health aspects of human ecology (including the health of immigrants, refugees, and displaced populations).
- Health of adolescents.

Member countries were invited to review the current status of these diseases through the collection of accurate data on prevalence and underlying risk factors.

DRAFT RESOLUTION

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
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**REPORT ON THE PROGRESS OF WHO-SPONSORED
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The Regional Committee,

Having reviewed the Regional Director's report on the progress of WHO-sponsored research activities in the Eastern Mediterranean Region*;

Noting that marked progress in research for health has taken place in only a few countries of the Region;

Being aware of the significance of health systems research in attaining the goal of Health for All;

Considering the multidisciplinary and multisectoral nature of health systems research;

1. URGES Member States:

- 1.1 to establish and strengthen national coordinating bodies for research;
- 1.2 to establish closer cooperation between the ministries of health and the universities in health systems research, particularly at the provincial and district levels; and
- 1.3 to nominate focal points for health systems research in those countries that have not yet done so.

2. REQUESTS the Regional Director:

to continue his support to Member States in the field of health systems research.

* Document EM/RC40/9.

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Introductory Paragraph

The objective of the programme of Research Promotion and Development is to promote research related to health and coordinate the development of related scientific activities in the Region.

Although the importance of health research in the implementation of health-for-all strategies is realized by most Member States, there are still some constraints in the development of national research capabilities.

The Regional Office is striving hard to overcome these obstacles. Policies are set by the Eastern Mediterranean Advisory Committee on Health Research, and implemented through national officers in charge of research. A report on the activities of the programme is presented in document EM/RC40/9.