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WHO COLLABORATING CENTERS
AT THE U.S. NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to provide the Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR) with experiences of the WHO Collaborating Centers (WHO CCs) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Of the designated centers, one is the Fogarty International Center (FIC) WHO CC for Research and Training in Biomedicine. In its role as a WHO CC, the FIC last year represented NIH in a U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) exercise on activities of our WHO CCs and ways in which they might work more effectively in support of WHO programs. A major recommendation of our report was the development of a network for communication and activities among WHO CCs working in similar technical areas and consideration for the appointment of a lead member of specific networks to organize efforts in cooperation with WHO, PAHO or other regional offices.

The vast majority of WHO CCs in the United States are at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and NIH. And, along with PAHO, we participated in planning the first meeting for all WHO CCs in the United States organized under the leadership of the University of Chicago at Illinois. Its major goals were: to develop a more cohesive and functional network of WHO CCs to enhance U.S. involvement to improve global health and further assist PAHO and WHO in meeting their objectives and to heighten public awareness of the role WHO CCs play in addressing regional and global priorities in partnership with PAHO and WHO to maintain and support a strong public health infrastructure. At a special session of the annual meeting of the National Council of International Health held 12-13 June in Arlington, Virginia, WHO CC Directors or designees identified strategies and recommendations for a more systematic and effective way to support PAHO and WHO programs, including ways for WHO CCs working in similar areas to communicate effectively with each other and with PAHO and WHO and to coordinate their activities. [Outcomes of this meeting will be reported in this presentation at the ACHR meeting in July.]
We all are aware that PAHO, like other WHO regional offices and headquarters itself, is facing considerable pressure from member states to establish program priorities in light of constrained resources for programs at the regional and national level. PHS agencies and U.S. universities similarly face budgetary constraints for both domestic and international activities. The economic climate behooves us to consider ways in which to pool our resources toward common ends. Toward this end, I conducted a survey of the NIH WHO CCs to identify their current and projected activities; the level of involvement with WHO, PAHO, other regional offices, and WHO CCs working in the same technical areas; and ideas on how we might work to enhance PAHO and WHO programs. I also examined the 1987 booklet of general information on WHO CCs prepared by headquarters and was interested to note that many of the recommendations from the PHS and NIH exercises, and from the NCIH meeting, are consistent with the functions WHO had in mind for the effective operation of designated WHO CCs. These were seen as: “keystones of the collaborative research efforts developed under WHO’s leadership at all levels” [forming] “for each specific research objective in the various sectors, a closely knit functional network” whose activities “must be planned, monitored and evaluated with the active and continued participation of the scientific community, at the national, regional and global levels. Meetings of directors of collaborating centers exemplify this process which gives to the research functions of the centres the added dimensions of research planning and research monitoring and evaluation…To these intrinsic functions of the collaborating centres must be added, for some centres, a function of coordination. Where the centres of a given network participate in a collaborative scheme, it may be necessary to assign to one or more of them, chosen in consideration of their quality and experience, the task of promoting, supporting and harmonizing the work undertaken in common.” (p. 8, 3.4, 3.6).

The fact that this early document espouses the merits of “the network of WHO CCs” as a major mechanism for carrying out technical cooperation between WHO and member states and, as needed, delegates responsibility for network management to one of the WHO CCs, is of special relevance to recommendations of both the PHS and the NIH studies. Of equal significance is our observation that the “network” concept does not appear to be functioning and that its operationalization has the potential to contribute to
global, regional and national efforts in health development. The NIH study also focused on the need for improved communications both between WHO/PAHO and among WHO CCs working in similar areas.

The presentation at the ACHR meeting will include a description of the functions of the NIH WHO CCs; details of the 1995-96 and projected 1997-98 activities of the NIH WHO CCs, including any involvement with other designated centers and WHO/PAHO; requests for and results of WHO CC involvement in WHO/PAHO activities; roles the WHO CCs might play in support of WHO/PAHO programs; problems in developing or conducting past experiences and ways they might be prevented in the future; and what WHO/PAHO might do to facilitate potential involvement of WHO CCs.

Of the NIH WHO CCs, four are located in the Office of the NIH Director, two at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), three at the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR) and two at the National Institute of Diabetes, Digestive and Kidney Disease (NIDDK). The topics covered range from microbial vector research to environmental health and include functions related to most of the prevention and control of major health problems in the Region of the Americas. The survey results which I will report represent input from 18 of the WHO CCs.
WHO Collaborating Centers at NIH:

Office of the Director:
- WHO Collaborating Center on AIDS
- WHO Collaborating Center for Applied Biosafety Programs and Research
- WHO Collaborating Center for Interferon
- WHO Collaborating Center for Traditional Medicine

National Institute on Aging:
- WHO Collaborating Center for Research on Health of the Elderly

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases:
- WHO Collaborating Center for Epidemiology of Allergic Diseases
- WHO Collaborating Center for Microbial Vector Research

National Cancer Institute:
- WHO Collaborating Center for Reference on Tumors of Laboratory Animals

National Institute of Dental Research:
- WHO Collaborating Center for Epidemiology, Prevention, and Treatment of Oral Diseases and Conditions

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences:
- WHO Collaborating Center for Environmental Health Effects

National Eye Institute:
- WHO Collaborating Center for the Prevention of Blindness

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute:
- WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Training in Cardiovascular Diseases for the Americas

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke:
- WHO Collaborating Center for Research Training in the Neurosciences
National Center for Research Resources:
  WHO Collaborating Center in Maintenance and Repair of Health Care Equipment
  WHO Collaborating Center for Defined Laboratory Animals
  WHO Collaborating Center for Reference and Research in Simian Viruses

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development:
  WHO Collaborating Center for the Clinical Evaluation of Vaccines in Developing Countries

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases:
  WHO Collaborating Center for Diabetes Research, Information, and Education
  WHO Collaborating Center for the Methodology, Design, and Analysis of Epidemiological and Clinical Research in Diabetes

National Institute on Drug Abuse:
  WHO Collaborating Center on Drug Dependence

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism:
  WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Training on Alcohol Problems

Fogarty International Center:
  WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Training in Biomedicine