XXXI ACHR

Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Health Research of the Pan American Health Organization 15-17 July 1996 Washington, D.C.

REPORT OF THE ACHR SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

Research Coordination
Division of Health and Human Development
Pan American Health Organization
Pan American Sanitary Bureau • Regional Office of the World Health Organization
Washington, D.C
1996
HSSR Meeting

FINAL REPORT

Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, 14-15 September 1995

Research Coordination
Division of Health and Human Development
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HSSR MEETING
SEPTEMBER 14-15, 1995

AGENDA

Thursday, September 14

09:00 to 09:30 - OPENING SESSION

Welcoming Remarks
Dr. Gordon DeFriese, Chairman

Address on behalf of PAHO
Dr. J.M. Paganini, HSP Director, PAHO

Objectives of the meeting and presentation of the agenda
Dr. A. Pellegrini, PAHO

09:30 to 10:30 - HSR: A research Agenda for the Nineties
Dr. Gordon DeFriese, UNC

10:30 to 11:00 - Coffee Break

11:00 to 11:30 - PAHO’s Experience on Promotion of HSSR
Dr. José M. Paganini and Dr. R. De los Rios, PAHO

11:30 to 12:00 - IDRC’S Experience on Promotion of HSSR
Dr. Enis Baris, Health Sciences Division, IDRC

12:00 to 14:00 - Lunch

14:00 to 14:45 - Plan of Action for the Promotion of HSSR
Dr. Lynn Silver, Consultant

14:45 to 15:30 - Discussion of the Plan of Action

15:30 to 16:00 - Coffee Break

16:00 to 17:30 - Discussion of the Plan of Action (continues)
Friday, September 15

09:00 to 09:45 - Research on Health Sector Reform
Dr. Ruben Suarez, Consultant

09:45 to 10:30 - Discussion

10:30 to 11:00 - Coffee Break

11:00 to 12:00 - Role of the PAHO'S Subcommittee on HSSR
Dr. Gordon DeFriese, UNC

12:00 to 14:00 - Lunch

14:00 to 15:00 - Conclusions and Recommendations to PAHO'S Director

15:00 to 15:15 - Closing Session
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Gordon H. DeFriese, Chairman
Professor of Social Medicine, Epidemiology and
Health Policy Administration, and Director
Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7590
Tel: (919) 966-7100 Fax: (919) 966-5764

Dr. Jaime Sepúlveda
Director General
Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública
Cuernavaca, Mexico
Tel: (52-73) 11-0111 Fax: (52-73) 11-2472

Mr. William Tholl *
Director
Health Policies and Economics
Canadian Medical Association
Ottawa, Canada
Tel: (613) 731-9331 Fax: (613) 731-1779

Dr. Barbara Starfield
Health Policy and Management
Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, Maryland
Tel: (410) 955-3737 Fax: (410) 955-0876

Dra. Sonia Draibe
Director
Nucleo de Estudos de Politicas Publicas (NEPP)
Universidad Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP)
São Paulo, Brazil
Tel: (55-192) 39-3143 Fax: (55-192) 39-4519

* Unable to attend
List of Participants (Cont.)

Dr. Enis Baris  
Senior Program Specialist  
Health Sciences Division  
International Development Centre (IDRC)  
Ottawa, Canada  
Tel: (613) 238-8163  
Fax: (613) 238-7230

Dr. Lynn Silver  
Consultant  
Instituto Fernandez Figueira (FiOCRUZ)  
Rio de Janeiro, Brasil  
Tel: (5521) 553-7412  
Fax: (55-21) 553-8094

Dr. Ruben Suarez  
Consultant  
Washington, D.C.  
Tel: (202) 861-3219  
Fax: (202) 861-2647

Pan American Health Organization  
525 23rd. Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20037

Dr. José M. Paganini  
Division Director  
Health Systems and Services (HSP)  
Tel: (202) 861-3221  
Fax: (202) 861-2648

Dr. Alberto Pellegrini Filho  
Coordinator  
Research Coordination (HDP/HDR)  
Division of Health and Human Development  
Tel: (202) 861-4305  
Fax: (202) 861-8472

Dr. Rebecca de los Rios  
Research Grants Program  
Research Coordination (HDP/HDR)  
Division of Health and Human Development  
Tel: (202) 861-4306  
Fax: (202) 861-8472
1- Opening Session

1.1- Welcome Remarks

In his welcome remarks, Dr. Gordon DeFriese emphasized his personal satisfaction in the way the Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) expressed his commitment to the promotion of HSSR during the last meeting of PAHO's Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR), held in Salvador, Brazil in April of 1995. Reviewing the history of this subcommittee, Dr. DeFriese stated that he perceives the meeting here in Chapel Hill as a turning point, the start of a new era for PAHO's role in this field.

1.2- Address on behalf of PAHO's Director

Dr. Paganini reaffirmed the position of the Director in relation to the importance that PAHO gives to the promotion of HSSR and in relation to his decision to invigorate the Subcommittee.

He also mentioned that HSSR should be strengthened to support the Health Sector Reform and the decision making process in relation to health policies. In this historical meeting the subcommittee should not only set the direction it will follow, but it should also express its commitment with the implementation, follow-up and evaluation of its recommendations.

1.3- Presentation of the agenda and objectives of the meeting

Dr. Pellegrini's remarks were directed to the background and terms of reference of this meeting. He compared the performances of the two existing ACHR subcommittees, Biotechnology and HSSR, since their creation in 1987. He also mentioned that, although PAHO has been developing several activities to promote HSSR, a Plan of Work is needed to orient and coordinate such activities by defining clear objectives, strategies, and expected results. The agenda reflected this need, since the discussions would be focused on the Plan of Work and the role of the Subcommittee in its implementation.
2- HSSR Agenda for the Nineties.

Dr. DeFriese presented a conceptual framework for HSSR, its definition, disciplines involved, types of research, etc. He also mentioned the main priority areas that should be promoted: assessment of needs, organization and financing, resource allocation and use, and systems performance and outcomes. He also discussed new areas of development of HSSR, such as the analysis of needs and demands, lifestyles and health systems performance, particularly, in relation to effectiveness, quality and efficiency. Taking into consideration the need for new vehicles to disseminate the scientific production of scholars working in this field, Dr. DeFriese suggested the possibility of creating a new journal, dedicated to disseminate the production of Latin American authors.

3- PAHO's Activities in HSSR

Dr. Paganini presented PAHO's structure, calling the attention to the fact that several units in the Organization are already involved in HSSR. In relation to initiatives promoted by the Division of Health Systems Organization he mentioned two main lines of cooperation:

- Dissemination of information.
  Two initiatives were emphasized: the publication of an anthology of the most important articles in HSSR, and the translation of the newsletter "Bridge." Dr. Paganini stressed that it would be important to promote the publication of HSSR articles in journals that are not specialized in this field and also to promote non-traditional ways of dissemination of information targeting users of HSSR research findings from outside the scientific community.

- Training
  In this line of cooperation, the production of modules, in collaboration with WHO and IDRC, and the organization of workshops for training in HSSR were highlighted.

Dr. Paganini stressed that the health sector reform process should be the framework for the promotion of HSSR. For almost thirty years now, very important changes have been taking place in the way health care is organized throughout the Region. Some indicators of these changes are the privatization of the hospital beds (private beds: 33% in 1963, 43% in 1983 and 50% in 1993); the decrease of the ratio
of beds/pop. in 30% in 30 years, whereas, the number of doctors/pop. have increased 100% in the same period, and the change in funding source (56% of the expenditures in the health sector in LAC come now from private sources, most of them for direct payment of services).

Dr. De los Rios presented quantitative and qualitative information about technical cooperation activities in HSSR promoted by the Program of Research Coordination, particularly the following: funding for HSSR projects by the PAHO's Research Grants Program (including projects developed during training courses using IDRC manuals); establishment of the fellowships program for training in public health research (since 1995 it has become a joint initiative of PAHO/IDRC); the pilot project with CNPq (Brazil) for the promotion of research projects that link research, health services institutions, and the requests for proposals in the area of HSSR.

4- IDRC Activities for the Promotion of HSSR

Dr. Enis Barris presented a description of projects funded by IDRC in the area of HSSR. In the period 1990-1995, 3.23 million Canadian dollars were awarded to HSSR all over the world, which corresponds to 21.7% of the projects funded by IDRC, and 16.3% of the expenditures. The grants were awarded (with a ratio of approval of 10%) for capacity building and research projects, and the average amount was 200,000 CAD with a duration of 2-3 years. IDRC is now taking a more proactive role in the promotion of problem-focused research projects. The agency is developing a conceptual framework relating macroeconomic adjustment policies and sectorial developments, in order to put any specific project in the context of those relationships. Multi-country comparative projects and capacity building for production, dissemination and utilization of knowledge are the areas that will receive priority.

5- Inter-American Partnership for Community Health and Education

Dr. Jorge Izquierdo presented an overview of this initiative of the Cecil G. Sheps Center for HSR. It is a mechanism for the promotion of networks between institutions dedicated to HSSR. At this moment, in its initial phase of implementation, institutions from six countries: Chile (Centro de I&D de la Educación), Peru (Universidad Cayetano Heredia), Mexico (Fundación Mexicana para la Salud), Brasil (Universidade de Pelotas), El Salvador (Universidad Centroamericana J.S. Cañas) and USA (Cecil G. Sheps Center) are participating in this network. The Inter-American Partnership gives more emphasis to process than to products, and it aims at exploring opportunities for funding joint or individual research proposals; increasing communication among members; and
promoting institutional development. Its members should be willing to commit resources in order to join the partnership. The main themes of work will be the epidemiologic transition, the health sector reform and the role of NGOs, universities and communities in health development.

6- **Plan of Action for the Promotion of Health Systems and Services Research for 1995-1999**

Dr. Lynn Silver presented this Plan, beginning with a discussion about the challenges faced by the health systems in the Region, particularly the changes in the demographic and epidemiologic situations and the changes in public policies. To face these challenges, the objectives of a Plan of Action in HSSR should be:

- To generate new knowledge about societies' organized responses to health problems, which can contribute to improving the equity, efficiency, and quality of the Region's health systems;
- To increase the capacity of countries to generate the knowledge needed to guide their health policy and administration;
- To increase the utilization of the results of research on health systems by policy makers, health services providers, and consumers.

In order to attain these objectives PAHO should pursue two main lines of technical cooperation. The first is to maintain a set of strategies for direct support to research aimed at different types of potential researchers. The second is to develop a set of activities which reinforce the research, dissemination, and advocacy capacity of participating countries.

The strategies to accomplish these objectives should be:

**a- Direct Support to Research:**
- focused calls for research in priority areas
- general fund for research based on established priorities
- multicenter collaborative studies on priority issues

**b- Combined Research-Training Strategies:**
- support of research during post-graduate training:
  - small grants for support of doctoral thesis;
  - fellowships for training in public health research (PAHO/IDRC initiative)
c- Communication and Networks:
   -support to relevant networks and electronic information access
   -support to creative dissemination of results
   -scientific meetings

d- Mobilizing Resources for Health Systems and Services Research:
   -promotion of national programs for supporting HSSR
   -mobilizing resources from other cooperation agencies to support HSSR

    The following table summarizes the problems, as well as, the objectives and strategies to promote HSSR in Latin America and the Caribbean:
## Problems

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<th>Production:</th>
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<th>Strategies</th>
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| Existing research production is quantitatively and qualitatively insufficient to permit evaluation and reorientation of the region's health systems. | To generate new knowledge about societies' organized response to health problems, which can contribute to improving the equity, efficiency, and quality of the region's health systems; | Direct Support to Research  
- Calls for research on critical issues  
- Development of protocols for multicenter collaborative studies on selected issues  
- Support to spontaneously formulated HSSR projects  

Support to research with a view to training researchers  
- Small grants funds for doctoral theses research in HSSR  
- Advanced training grants program  
- Two stage process in calls for research with seminars on methodology and project improvement  

Strategies for Promoting Research  
- Collaborative programs with national agencies for research which aim to promote HSSR and strengthen links between research institutions and health systems  
- Support networks in HSSR as potentially effective local advocates for HSSR  
- Promote financing of HSSR by other agencies  
- Support the development of centers for post-graduate training in HSSR through training researchers and financing research  
- Support access to and training in electronic networks and information sources  
- Promote collaboration between researchers throughout the region working on related problems |
| Research is often not targeted to critical problems | | |
| Limited number of highly trained researchers | | |
| Relative isolation of researchers and limited access to information | | |
| Limited Funding for Research | | |

## Use:

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<th>Use:</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
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| Lack of information based health care management and policy culture | To increase the utilization of the results of research on health systems by policy makers, health services, and consumers. | Promote the creative dissemination of the results of research  
- Promote Networks in HSSR as local advocates for the use of research and information in policy-making and management  
- Promote the training of health professionals and future decision-makers in research methods |
| Lack of adequate dissemination and marketing of research findings | | |

In relation to this topic the subcommittee made the following comments and recommendations:
The Subcommittee decided to focus the discussion on the strategic aspects of the Plan of Work, leaving more operational aspects to the secretariat. In terms of strategies, the importance of the promotion of inter-country collaboration through multicentric studies or other mechanisms was stressed. The importance of advocacy was also stressed, recognizing that this strategy should be supported by a good portfolio of research projects.

- The subcommittee recognized that PAHO's technical cooperation in the area of health systems organization should be based on strong scientific-technical evidences. For this reason, it is very important to elaborate a clear definition of research priorities in this area making equity the main focus of these priorities.

- The Subcommittee recognizes as a dilemma: (a) supporting research in more developed countries to obtain better results in terms of production of knowledge vs. (b) supporting research in less-developed countries to strengthen their capacity. The Subcommittee considers that it is important to support research in both situations by means of adequate mechanisms. One of these mechanisms could be the support to multicentric projects that would include less-developed and developed countries in terms of HSSR, the latter taking the responsibility for technical support to the less-developed countries and their participating institutions.

- In relation to another dilemma: supporting small vs. large projects, the Subcommittee considers that the regular funds of PAHO should be assigned to small projects to amplify its coverage. Nevertheless, some seed money should be put aside to support larger projects in partnership with other agencies.

- The Subcommittee supported the Plan of Work presented, but emphasized the need to specify more clearly the activities and the levels of responsibility to implement them. A tri-dimensional matrix would help this definition (the third dimension formed by the three levels of PAHO: The Member Countries, The Sanitary Bureau and HDR + HSP):
The Multiple Dimensions of PAHO Initiatives in HSSR

OBJECTIVES

Generate new knowledge
Increase HSR capacity
Increase HSR dissemination & utilization

STRATEGIES

Direct Support to Research
Training
Comm & Networks
Mobilizing Resources

THREE LEVELS OF PAHO,
the unit
the staff
the organization
7. The Request for Proposals on Health Sector Reform

Dr. Ruben Suarez presented this initiative, which is part of the Plan of Action. It consists of an invitation to researchers in the Region to submit analytical research projects assessing the impact of changes in the organization and financing of health service institutions; on the efficiency and equity of national health systems; and on the quality of health services. The purpose of this special call for proposals is to stimulate development of empirically-based policy-oriented research projects in support of national health sector reform initiatives.

In 1995, almost all the countries of the Region declared that they were undertaking some type of health sector reform initiative. The changes in the organization and the financing of health sector institutions are important components for the transformation, or reform, of national health care systems. There is little empirical evidence of the impact these changes may have on the efficiency and equity of the national health systems; on the quality of health care services; and on the effect which these changes may exert on the health status of the population affected. For this reason the study of these impacts should be the focus of the proposals.

Dr. Suarez gave some examples of the type of changes in the organization and financing that should be analyzed, as well as the areas where the impacts are of most interest. He also mentioned the main criteria that are recommended for reviewing the proposals.

In relation to this topic, the main discussions and recommendations of the Subcommittee were the following:

- The Subcommittee recognized the importance of the initiative and agreed on most of the terms of reference. Three main suggestions were made:
  - In the document presented, there is an imbalance between the organizational and financial aspects of the reform with clear predominance of the latter. The document should address both aspects with the same level of development;
  - The projects should not be restricted to the analysis of national or macro-level systems. The projects should also be allowed to analyze intermediate and local level systems, as long as there is a group of health services institutions and a corresponding population of reference at those levels.
  - The Subcommittee expressed concerns about the feasibility of the projects due to the large scope of the terms of reference and the small amount of funds per project (maximum US$30,000). A reduction of the scope, or a suggestion of low-cost approaches, should be taken into consideration.
The members of the Subcommittee will send to the secretariat some specific comments about the document presented in order to prepare a final version of the terms of reference.

8- Role of the Subcommittee on HSSR

The members of the Subcommittee identified three essential questions that should help define their role as an advisory body to PAHO’s Director in HSSR:

- How should PAHO invest its resources in the support of HSSR programs and initiatives?
- What are the research questions which should be addressed? and in what order of priority?
- How should PAHO attempt to assume a new role of leadership for HSSR within the Region?

In order to address those questions the Subcommittee and its members should participate more intensively in the life of the Organization and be informed of its activities in HSSR and related areas.

Some more specific activities of the Subcommittee and its members could include:

- a role of a bridge between the Organization and the researchers dedicated to HSSR throughout the Region;
- mobilization of resources for research proposals;
- review of research proposals like the ones that will be received in response to the RFP in health sector reform;
- review of scientific production in relation to key HSSR issues for purposes of broad dissemination. Particular emphasis should be given to research addressing issues related to equity in health care services.