HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN MEXICO

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Researchers in Mexico have studied the organization and delivery of health services for many years, however, the organized effort to develop health services research in Mexico is relatively recent. A fundamental commitment to this development was initiated in 1977 with the establishment of the Sub-Secretariat for Planning in the Secretariat for Health and Assistance. As part of this change, health services research was identified as a fundamental tool to evaluate impacts of existing activities and to develop new strategies for improving health services. The concept of health services research as a tool for planning and evaluation was incorporated in the organization and structure of this new Sub-Secretariat and a small Department of Health Services Research was established.

In June 1978 a major effort was made to broaden the base of involvement in health services research activities and their use. Under the auspices of the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) the Secretary of Health and Welfare, and the National University a seminar in health services research was organized by the Sub-Secretary for Planning. This seminar included as invitees individuals with potential or actual interest in health services research from all of the
institutions that provide health care as well as the academic institutions and organizations that support or initiate research activities.

As a focus for the discussions six persons from other countries with major experience and responsibility in aspects of health services research were invited to participate. The expressed objective was to identify experiences in other countries in the organization and management of health services research and to use this experience to identify critical areas for development in Mexico.

A tremendous extension of awareness of the importance of health services research resulted from the broad participation in this seminar and the widespread distribution of the document that was produced as a result. Equally important two fundamental principles for the development of health services research activities in Mexico were identified by the seminar. There was widespread agreement that a strategy to develop health services research activities needed to have two distinct but interrelated emphases; 1) the development of increased capacity to produce research including the training of researchers and the support of research activities and, 2) the development of an increased capacity to use the results of health services research both by creating links between the research and the planning and evaluation processes and by development of more effective means of dissemination of research results. This seminar and its conclusions remains the central source of many of the characteristics of health services in Mexico.
The Subsecretariat for Planning became part of the Subsecretariat for Health in 1980 and was made responsible for a new program to expand health service in marginal urban areas. The health services research unit continued to develop with particular emphasis on research and evaluation strategies to support the implementation of the marginal areas program. With this central focus, a proposal for research based in Ciudad Juárez was developed by this unit as part of the Mexican component of the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Initiative and research interests among the border began to develop as part of this initiative.

In 1980 CONACYT established an advisory Sub-Committee on health services research as part of a group of Sub-Committees in health research generally. This Sub-Committee had the following responsibilities:

1) The identification of priorities for research
2) The formulation of policies for program and project development
3) Definition of strategies for financing
4) Definition of strategies for the development and formation of human resources
5) The establishment of mechanisms and evaluation of projects

The committee, which initiated its activities toward the end of 1981, included representatives from the research training programs in
academic settings, the major health services institutions, and the PAHO. While the main focus was to establish policies for CONACYT, the make up of the committee and the integration of producers of research and users of research gave it a view sufficiently broad to encompass all aspects of health services research. In general this working committee had a high degree of consensus on the necessity to develop more effective means of attracting competent researchers into the fields and equally important, on the development of means to facilitate the use of health services research in the planning, operation, and evaluation activities of the institutions in the health sector. The committee recognized that the interdisciplinary nature of health services research, in contrast to the disciplinary structure of most research settings, needed the creation of new institutions and new means for undertaking collaborative work. They recognized as well the need to develop processes for decision making in the health system which could use health services research effectively and identify areas of priority for this activity.

One result of the extensive discussions about health services research during 1981 was the establishment in February 1982 of the project MEXICO 8900 as a component of the cooperative activities between Mexico and the Pan American Health Organization. This project, Research and Evaluation in Health Services, has as its major objec-
tives the support of the capacity to do research and to use and apply the results of these investigations. The experience in the Sub-Secre-tariat for Planning and the assessments of the expert committees indicated the difficulty of organizing activities across institutional lines while recognizing this type of collaborative effort as fundamentally important. The Project MEXICO 8903 was established to facilitate this interaction among the research community and the institutions.

At the current time this program includes a number of activities. A fundamental component is ongoing participation in the development of research and evaluation activities in the reconstituted Under-Secretary for Planning, an agency which now has an extended mandate for inter-institutional coordination. These activities include development of an overall health services research strategy which can serve as a guide for diverse program developments.

In addition, the project provides an ongoing source of technical assistance in the design and development of health services research projects and programs. As examples of the latter, this project is cooperating with the public health services of the State of Mexico to develop a research program based on their extensively developed information system, and will be assisting in the development of programs of research in the School of Public Health, and the Mexican Institute of Social Security. In addition, ongoing technical assistance
is provided health services research activities currently ongoing in Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro Interamericano de Estudios de Seguridad Social, and Centro Universitario de Tecnología Educatacional para la Salud.

To provide an ongoing setting for the sharing of research experiences in major themes and to begin the development of collaborative research strategies a series of seminar-workshops in health services research have been organized by PAHO with support of the Under-Secretary for Planning. The first of these series has emphasized the development of measures of levels of health and is focused on the uses of such measures for priority and high risk identification, allocation of resources and evaluation of programs. A goal of the seminar, in addition to the ongoing participation of individuals from almost all of the institutions and academic settings with interests in this theme, is the development of a series of standard analytic strategies which can be applied in diverse institutions, thus permitting individual research activities to be accumulated and produce a more reliable analytic experience. Other series are now being developed in other research areas.

In the area of human resources development for health services research, the program of study for Masters in Health Services Research at ENEP Iztacala is now in its third year as is the program...
for a Masters in Public Health Research at UAM Xochimilco. These programs have concentrated primarily on the training of analysts and are part of the universities' postgraduate medical programs. There is a growing interest in health services research in other parts of the universities particularly in the social and political sciences as the priority being given to health activities in the country as a whole becomes more evident. Research projects ranging from development of health policy to the impacts of nutritional policies on health are now under way in UNAM, UAM, Colegio de México and various other research centers in Mexico including the Center for Research in Alimentation and Development in Hermosillo.

The recent support of the Sub-Secretary for Planning and the priorities being given to health services research is a further indication that health services research activities in Mexico can continue to develop in a way that acknowledges both the need for good research and the need to organize and structure each process so the results of research can be used to improve the health of the Mexican people. This goal remains central in Mexico and its facilitation forms the central focus of project MEXICO 8900.

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