Pooling academic resources for public health

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The Asia-Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health marks an important anniversary: it has been supporting collaboration between academic public health institutions in the region for the last ten years.

Ten years ago, in January 1984, the Asia-Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health (APACPH) was established, bringing together five schools of public health. The idea had taken shape the previous year at a symposium on public health in Asia and the Pacific, where academic leaders in this field were urged to join forces to enhance the health status of the region. The Consortium has five main objectives:

- to raise the quality of professional education in public health and make it more relevant to current needs, with special emphasis on leadership;
- to enhance the knowledge, skills and effective methods available to health workers through joint projects;
- to devote more of the schools' resources to solving health problems through closer links with each other and with ministries of health;
- to increase opportunities for graduate students through curriculum development and academic sharing;
- to make child survival a major priority.

To attain these objectives it tries to ensure that as much attention as possible is given to involving the academic health institutions of the region in government policy formulation and decision-making. This places a demand not only on politicians to give due recognition to health needs but also on academics to ensure that what they teach and study is anchored in practical realities.

The Consortium, which now comprises 31 academic institutions or units in 16 countries and areas (see box), is an international nongovernmental academic organization with a board of directors which meets twice a year. It is supported by membership dues and a variety of grants and payments from governments and intergovernmental organizations, including UNICEF, WHO, the China Medical Board of New York, and the governments of Japan and Malaysia. During its formative years, from 1985 to 1992, it also received major support from the United States through USAID and the University of Hawaii.

During the past 10 years APACPH has carried out a large number of activities which include setting up a data bank on the programmes and services of its members, assessing public health problems, designing new curriculum and systems for service delivery, facilitating information and faculty exchanges, and running workshops for academic administrators. It has also organized conferences on issues of regional concern such as the impact of urbanization on health, aging, child survival, AIDS, occupational health and many other subjects. Since 1987 it has published
Countries and areas with institutions belonging to the Asia-Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health

- Australia
- Bangladesh
- China
- Indonesia
- Japan
- Lao People's Democratic Republic
- Malaysia
- Nepal
- Philippines
- Republic of Korea
- Singapore
- Sri Lanka
- Taiwan
- Thailand
- USA
- Viet Nam

the Asia-Pacific journal of public health, a quarterly whose editorial office is at the National University of Singapore. It is the only English language journal on public health issues in the Asia and Pacific region.

Emphasis in the coming years will be placed on setting common standards for teaching and research, so that members can make more use of each other's programmes. At the same time it is hoped that membership of the Consortium will continue to expand. A particular concern will be to focus more resources on preventive care rather than curative. This, together with APACPH's other objectives, will be promoted not only through top-level dialogue but also through collaboration within and between the member institutions.

The Asia-Pacific journal of public health will give special attention to featuring work being done by non-English-speaking researchers, so that a fuller range of activities can be represented. In these ways APACPH expects not only to be responding to change during the next ten years but also leading the way in making health care more effective in the region.