



ADDRESS by  
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DIRECTOR  
WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION  
to the  
MEDIUM-TERM PROGRAMME  
CONSOLIDATION/CO-ORDINATION MEETING (Grouping 5)  
EMRO, Alexandria, 8-12 April 1984

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to EMRO on the occasion of the convening of the Consolidation/Co-ordination Meeting for the Medium-Term Programmes for Objectives 6 and 14 of the Seventh General Programme of Work.

The two programmes, Public Information and Education for Health, and Health Information Support, which you will be considering during your deliberations are essential elements for the proper and effective delivery of all other health programmes in WHO's classified list. The operational linkages between the two programmes you are considering must be well forged if they are each to play their proper and necessary roles. It is important to note that the achievement of the goal of Health for All by the Year 2000 through Primary Health Care depends, to a large extent, on effective health education of individuals, groups, families, and communities at large. It is equally important to mobilize such individuals and communities by involving them actively in the dissemination of the health information, as well as in the promotion of appropriate health practices, necessary for their well-being.

Your meeting will undoubtedly undertake a thorough review of the objectives and targets of both these programmes, considering the approaches needed to achieve the goals, and the activities that these engender. In doing this, you will have to bear in mind the actual needs of Member States, the availability of human and material resources that the States can put at the disposal of those responsible for health education, and the impact of your proposals on peoples of different ethnic or religious backgrounds.

At this juncture, it may be pertinent to pose some questions which have been occupying the minds of health planners and managers for a long time. In informing the public on how to protect itself against disease and injury and on how to lead a healthier and more socially and economically productive life:

- Has enough been done by the right people, and has their message been addressed to the right audience at the right time, using the appropriate mass media to produce the expected results?
- Have doctors, nurses, midwives, health workers, and others been trained with the necessary skills to convey the message of promotion of health through health education? In short, are they now skillful health educators?
- Are the social and religious institutions, as well as other groups or associations of the population, in particular their leaders, effectively motivated to assist in conveying the "message of health" to the desired sectors of the community?

As one group, one may consider today's school children. One wonders whether their health education has been so designed that it will equip them in the future to protect themselves against infection and disease, to practice healthier habits, to seek medical care at the appropriate time and in the proper health institution, and to discuss sensibly, with their parents and other family members - as well as with their friends, health matters and by what means they may achieve a healthy life?

As you are aware, there is a wealth of publications about health in all parts of the world, in most of the languages written or spoken by the human race. Many books, pamphlets, magazines, journals, newspapers, posters and films are concerned with the subject in one form or another. However, the questions we must ask ourselves is: "Does the proper information reach the target groups it is intended to address?" and "Who or which groups could benefit most?"

Our experience in this Region, through Programme Review Missions recently launched to Member States, indicated that, at least in our sphere, the answer to the first question was "No". We have been told by Member States that our information system support is not working effectively or efficiently. Much of the health education material we despatch to Member States seems either to get mislaid or to collect dust in the archives of Ministries of Health or related educational institutions: in any event, the material does not reach the target populations. It is therefore imperative that we review and reconsider our health information dissemination and distribution mechanisms to Member States in order to make them more efficient and more useful at the same time.

I do not intend to remind you of the important task which lies ahead of you. In the meantime, I wish to reiterate that both the Organization and the Member States look forward earnestly and hopefully to the conclusions and recommendations of your deliberations.

May I wish you all a fruitful meeting and a happy stay in Alexandria.  
May God bless you all.