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ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTÉ

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EXECUTIVE BOARD

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Agenda item 2.9.1

# REVIEW OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL STUDY ON MEDICAL LITERATURE SERVICES TO MEMBERS

## Report of the Working Group

The Executive Board at its forty-seventh session established a Working Group of four members to prepare the Organizational Study on Medical Literature Services to Members which the Twenty-third World Health Assembly, in its resolution WHA23.26, had entrusted the Executive Board to undertake.

In accordance with resolution WHA24.37, the Report of the Working Group is now submitted to the Executive Board for its consideration, together with a draft resolution prepared by the Working Group.[1]

[1] Annex 1.

CONTENTS

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Origin of the study

The Twenty-third World Health Assembly decided (WHA23.26)[1] on the recommendation of the Executive Board that the subject of the next organizational study should be "Medical Literature Services to Members" and requested the Executive Board to report to the Twenty-fourth World Health Assembly on the progress of the study.

The Executive Board at its forty-seventh session in January 1971 appointed a Working Group, composed of Professor E. J. Aujaleu, Dr S. P. Ehrlich, jr, Dr D. D. Venediktov and Mr Y. Wolde-Gerima, to make a preliminary study and, having considered the report of this Group, reported (EB47.R48)[2] in its turn to the Twenty-fourth World Health Assembly that it considered the continuation of the study for a further year would be essential and requested the Director-General to proceed with the collection and analysis of any further information that might assist the Working Group. The Twenty-fourth World Health Assembly in resolution WHA24.37[3] decided that the study should be continued for another year and requested the Board "to report on its study to the Twenty-fifth World Health Assembly".

## 1.2 Its method and orientation

At a meeting held during the forty-eighth session of the Board, the Working Group approved with some amendments the text of a questionnaire to Member States submitted to it by the Director-General. This questionnaire was sent to all Member States and Associate Members as an attachment to letter C.L.22.1971, with a request that replies should be sent by 31 August 1971. By the end of the year, a total of 69 replies had been received, and an analysis of them prepared by the Director-General was submitted to a meeting of the Working Group held during the forty-ninth session of the Executive Board. The Working Group having duly considered this document and other documentation before it made detailed recommendations to the Director-General for the drafting of the study. At a final meeting the Group examined the draft in detail and prepared the final text of the study for submission to the Board.

It is recognized that in this study no attempt has been made to examine the whole subject of international biomedical communications by the medium of the printed word and by recent technological developments such as audiovisual aids, magnetic tape, etc. The vast growth of scientific and medical knowledge and the difficulties of the adequate dissemination of medical information constitutes one of the most important problems facing the present system of public health both on a national and an international level. The different forms of medical information, both of the traditional kind (medical literature) and of the newly developed techniques are of great significance to the development of public health and of medical research, as well as in the training of health personnel in different countries. While recognizing the importance of these problems their complex nature has led the study to be limited specifically to the medical literature services of the Organization itself, and the recommendations to those areas of activity in which the Board believes WHO has a vital role to play either through its own resources or through co-ordination of activities and co-operation with other interested international organizations. However, the Board wishes to record its view that the problems of biomedical communications today are of the greatest importance and recommends that the role of WHO in relation to modern developments in this field be reviewed by an international group of experts.

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[1] Handbook of Resolutions and Decisions, 11th ed., p. 444.

[2] Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org., No. 189, p. 27.

[3] Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org., No. 193, pp. 19-20.

## 2. WHO LITERATURE AND DOCUMENTATION SERVICES

### 2.1 WHO publications and documents services

The major service that WHO provides to Members in respect of medical literature is its comprehensive range of publications arising from or directly related to WHO activities. In addition, WHO circulates to international groups collaborating in its technical work unpublished documents; provides medical books and periodicals in support of WHO projects; procures medical literature on behalf of Members; provides medico-bibliographical information and photocopies on request; administers a scheme for the international exchange of duplicate medical literature; gives assistance in the training of medical librarians; and provides advisory services to medical libraries.

#### 2.1.1 WHO publications

The WHO publishing programme was the subject of organizational studies by the Executive Board in the course of three of its major sessions: namely, the ninth in 1952 and the twenty-third and twenty-fifth in 1959 and 1960. For the first of these studies the Director-General submitted a factual report on WHO publications,[1] while for the second and third he prepared a more comprehensive report.[2] In the 10 years that have elapsed since the publication of the latter report, there has been no fundamental change in the WHO publishing policy, although the programme has evolved in response to changing needs. One of the most important developments during this decade was the decision of the World Health Assembly that, starting in 1961, many WHO publications would also be issued in the Russian language. Until then, only the WHO Chronicle had been available in Russian.

The WHO publishing programme is not conceived as an end in itself. In general, WHO publications are the vehicles for making available to governments of Member countries and their health workers the product of specific WHO activities or of continuing WHO programmes. Without the medium of publication these activities and programmes would be without impact.

In its report on WHO publications submitted to the ninth session of the Executive Board in January 1952,[3] the Director-General stated:

> "Although the success of WHO depends on the support of governments, the Organization cannot hope to obtain satisfactory results without the full co-operation of the medical and public health professions. The publications are the principal link, indeed the only effective medium of communication, with professional health workers. WHO will ultimately be judged by the practical results achieved in its various public health projects and by the quality of scientific leadership it has provided to governments and to professional health workers; publications are a medium for reporting the practical achievements and for providing the leadership."

##### 2.1.1.1 Types of WHO publications

WHO publications may be conveniently grouped as follows:

Periodicals

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| Original scientific and technical articles | Bulletin of the World Health Organization |
| News of WHO activities | WHO Chronicle |

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[1] Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org., 1952, No. 40, pp. 93-106.

[2] Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org., 1960, No. 99, pp. 125-157.

[3] Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org., 1952, No. 40, p. 94.

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|---|---|
| Legislative | International Digest of Health Legislation |
| Statistical | World Health Statistics Report |
| Epidemiological | Weekly Epidemiological Record |
| Popular | World Health |

Technical Report Series

Reports of international groups of experts; 485 have already been issued.

Monograph Series

In-depth studies and textbooks for postgraduate workers, the manuscripts of which are closely examined by a number of internationally recognized authorities in several countries to ensure that so far as possible all schools of thought and regional differences are adequately represented; 60 have so far been published.

Public Health Papers

Surveys of existing knowledge and practical approaches to tasks facing the public health or medical profession and discussions of modern trends and changing concepts in public health; 45 have so far been published.

Official Records

They include the proceedings of the World Health Assembly, reports of the Executive Board, the Programme and Budget Estimates, the Annual Reports of the Director-General, and Reports on the World Health Situation.

Reference works

Specifications and standards such as International Pharmacopoeia, International Standards for Drinking-Water, Specifications for Pesticides.

Directories

For example, directories of medical schools, of schools of public health, of schools of nursing, of schools of pharmacy, of schools of veterinary health.

Bibliographies

For example, Bibliography on Bilharziasis, Medical Education: Annotated Bibliography, 1946-1955, Bibliography on the Epidemiology of Cancer.

Statistical

World Health Statistics Annual, International Classification of Diseases.

Non-serial publications

A wide range of publications usually published only in English and French that are not included in the above-mentioned categories.

Detailed information on what WHO has published will be found in two sources of reference:

1. World Health Organization Publications, Catalogue 1947-1971

The catalogue is brought up to date at intervals of about two years and the last edition contains 8156 titles.

2. The following complete bibliographies:

Publications of the World Health Organization, 1947-1957
A Bibliography

1958; 128 pages, 1749 titles.

Publications of the World Health Organization, 1958-1962
A Bibliography

1964; 125 pages, 1442 titles.

Publications of the World Health Organization, 1963-1967
A Bibliography

1969; 152 pages, 1708 titles.

These bibliographies of WHO's publications list all technical articles and works in alphabetical order by subject and all administrative and general publications under certain main headings. There are author and country indexes and list of WHO publications by series.

2.1.1.2 Range and content of WHO technical publications

Essentially, the present WHO technical publications are a reflection of the technical interests of the Organization. They make publicly available the results of scientific work supported or promoted by WHO or otherwise of interest to it; the advice of international groups of experts; WHO-supported studies of subjects of public health importance; and information obtained from Member States and collated by WHO (e.g., health legislation, health statistics, directories).

No attempt has yet been made to publish purely educational material, i.e., textbooks for use on a large scale by medical students, although a shortage of medical textbooks is a serious problem in some Member countries. It is however possible, as will be discussed below, to visualize that a time may come when it would be appropriate for the Organization either to publish itself, or to assist in the publication of, textbooks oriented to the special needs of medical students in developing countries.

2.1.1.3 Language policy

In 1948 the Executive Board approved "the principle of publication in the two working languages of the Organization" (EB2.R14) and consequently the WHO linguistic policy for publications was originally that all of them should be issued in both English and French, either in separate editions or bilingually. However, at its sixth session in 1950 the Executive Board decided that, in view of its technical character, an exception should be made in the case of the Bulletin of the World Health Organization, and that articles in it should be published either in English or in French, according to the language in which they were submitted. In either case, articles were to be accompanied by a summary in the other language. The present situation is that all publications except the Bulletin are issued in both English and French editions, or in a single bilingual edition.

The Technical Report Series, Monograph Series, Public Health Papers, Official Records and certain non-serial publications are also published in Spanish, as are the WHO Chronicle and World Health. By special arrangement between headquarters and AMRO, Spanish translations of Bulletin articles are sometimes published in the Boletín de la Oficina Sanitaria Panamericana, which also publishes abstracts in Spanish of other articles in the Bulletin.

At its twenty-fifth session, the Executive Board agreed that in principle steps should be taken, starting in 1961, to extend the use of the Russian language in WHO publications (EB25.R44),[1] and the Thirteenth World Health Assembly decided "to extend the use of the Russian language in certain publications of the World Health Organization, the extension to take place gradually and in an orderly way over a period of three years, beginning in 1961" (WHA13.15).[1] To implement these two resolutions, an agreement was made with the Ministry of Health of the USSR for the Russian editions to be produced in Moscow under a contractual arrangement. In the case of the Monograph Series, Public Health Papers, the Technical Report Series, the World Health Statistics Annual and non-serial publications, only selected titles are published within the limits of the budgetary provision, the choice being made by consultation between the "Medicina" Publishing House, Moscow, and WHO. However, all volumes in the Official Records series are issued in Russian. There is also a cover-to-cover translation in Russian of the Bulletin of the World Health Organization, the WHO Chronicle and World Health.

The distribution of the Russian editions is carried out directly by the responsible authorities in the USSR; 2500 copies of the WHO Chronicle are issued, of which 2000 are distributed free of charge (600 outside the USSR and 1400 inside the USSR). For the Bulletin, the Monograph Series, Public Health Papers, the Technical Report Series, and non-serial publications, out of the 2500 copies produced, 1000 are distributed free of charge and 1500 placed on sale. The Official Records and the World Health Statistics Annual are not put on sale, and consequently only 1000 copies of them are printed, all being for free distribution. The circulation of World Health has been fixed at 3000 copies per number.

In addition to the four languages discussed above, the WHO Chronicle has been published in Chinese since 1947, while World Health is available in German, Hindi, Japanese, and Portuguese and a partial translation into Arabic also appears quarterly.

The implementation of this programme has confronted the Organization with difficult problems. Apart from the high cost of producing a publication in two, three, or four languages, the main difficulty over a period of years has been to find and retain an adequately trained staff of editors and translators and to produce the translations without excessive delays. As an example, the delay in producing an issue of Public Health Papers in French, Russian, or Spanish varies from 5 to 12 months, but for more voluminous works, such as those published in the Monograph Series, the delay may be 20-26 months and occasionally as much as 3 years. This is understandable and unavoidable in view of the highly technical nature of some of these publications and the difficulties of translation and editing that they involve.

While such delays are acceptable, or at least tolerable, for textbooks that are not in danger of becoming rapidly outdated, they are unacceptable in the case of in-depth studies on highly topical subjects of interest to research workers. Furthermore, in some cases there may be an urgent need for a work on a specialized subject in one of the usual languages of publication, but no demand at all in another language.

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[1] Handbook of Resolutions and Decisions, 11th ed., p. 147.

Two examples illustrate these difficulties:

In the 1960s, when the immunology programme of the Organization was started, there was an immediate and evident need for an advanced textbook on fundamental concepts and methods in immunology in French and Spanish. However, no such need existed in English, and the plan for issuing this publication in French and Spanish only had to be abandoned.

Another example is a publication on the genetics of insect vectors of disease, reviewing the status of research on the subject in 1967 and examining future prospects, which was intended for the benefit of research workers working independently or engaged in collaborative research projects sponsored by the Organization in various parts of the world. While 2000 copies of a publication of this type amounting to nearly 800 pages could have been produced by the Organization in one language only within a year, at a cost of $ 15 000, the cost of producing it in a second language, taking into account translation, editing, printing, paper, and binding, but excluding the cost of office space and facilities, would have exceeded $ 30 000, and it appeared extremely doubtful whether a translation could have been produced in less than 30 to 36 months. Because the publication was urgently needed as a working tool for research workers on a subject with a direct bearing on the Organization's programme and because of the prohibitive cost of translation and publication in a second language, the solution adopted was to enturst it to a commercial publisher for publication under contract in English only.

2.1.1.4 Contractual publishing

Contractual publishing is an arrangement whereby a manuscript is entrusted to a commercial publisher for publication and distribution on behalf of the Organization under stated conditions specified by contract.

Particulars of the manuscript are sent to a number of publishers - 10 in the case of Genetics of Insect Vectors of Disease. If several of them express interest, the publication is entrusted to the one who makes the most advantageous offer to the Organization.

The conditions vary from case to case and are largely determined by the expected market for the publication. In some cases, the publisher asks for a flat subsidy, in others he expects the Organization to purchase a stated number of copies at an agreed price below the list price of the publication. In exceptional circumstances, if a publication appears a sufficiently attractive proposition for the publisher he may take full responsibility for its printing and distribution, covering the whole cost of production, or even paying a stated royalty to the Organization on all copies sold (10 per cent. in the case of Genetics of Insect Vectors of Disease).

Since 1967, when the above-mentioned contractual agreement was made with a commercial publisher in Holland, another publication on problems involved in the epidemiological study and control of schistosomiasis has been commissioned to a publisher in Switzerland and publication of the voluminous proceedings of an international symposium on scleroderma, sponsored by the Organization, has been entrusted to a publisher in France.

Such arrangements, however, present a number of disadvantages:

(a) The cost of a book produced by a commercial publisher must inevitably be higher than that of a book published by the Organization because of reasons inherent to the booktrade market. Thus for example, Genetics of Insect Vectors of Disease is sold at a price of approximately $ 60, whereas a similar book published by WHO would have been sold for less than half this price. It is obvious that the higher price will have adverse effects on the distribution of a book, especially in developing countries or in countries in which the local currency is not readily convertible.

(b) A book published by a private publisher is likely to have a smaller total sale than a WHO publication not only because of the reasons mentioned under (a) above but also because of the prestige of the WHO imprint, the numerous WHO sales agents in 68 countries, and the special arrangements available to WHO for the sale of its publications (combined and global subscriptions, substantially reduced rates in certain countries, acceptance of payment in local currencies).

(c) Publications issued under the imprint of a commercial publisher on behalf of the Organization are not normally distributed free of charge to those who would be entitled to free copies of WHO publications. This is also an important factor in hampering their effective distribution.

2.1.1.5 Distribution of WHO publications

The question of the distribution, by sale or otherwise, of WHO publications was given considerable attention by the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board during the earlier years of the Organization. In the course of its study of WHO publications in 1952, the Board stressed the need to increase sales. However, an increase in sales was by no means considered an end in itself. The Board had recognized a year earlier that "Although it is desirable to offset as high a proportion as possible of the cost of production of WHO publications, they are not looked upon primarily as a source of revenue. The main importance of sales resides in the fact that only in the case of such publications as are purchased is it possible to have some certainty that they are finding their way into the hand of persons who really need them".[1]

The Fifth World Health Assembly requested (WHA5.24)[2] the Board and the Director-General to continue their studies on the distribution of WHO publications. At the eleventh session of the Board in 1953, the Director-General submitted that the WHO distribution policy for publications should be based on eight postulates.[3] These were that:

1. The objectives of publication cannot be fully attained without effective distribution.

2. Worldwide distribution of WHO publications, whether by sale or otherwise, can be most effectively developed by the use of established national channels.

3. The determination of the most effective national channels of distribution, the appraisal of the sales possibilities of each publication in each country, and the promotion of distribution, whether by sale or otherwise, of WHO publications, are important elements of the publishing programme for which the necessary staff services and funds should be available.

4. The main purpose of sales is to increase distribution without additional cost to the Organization.

5. Sale is a method of distribution whose effectiveness varies according to:

(a) the degree of organization of the book trade in each country;
(b) the subject of the publication;
(c) the physical form and price of the publication;

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[1] Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org., 1952, No. 40, p. 100.

[2] Handbook of Resolutions and Decisions, 11th ed., p. 150.

[3] Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org., 1960, No. 99, p. 145.

(d) the market which exists in each country for publications in the languages in which WHO publications are available;
(e) the financial resources of health institutions and libraries in each country;
(f) the extent to which purchases can be made with locally available currencies.

6. It follows from point 5 that no single formula is applicable to the distribution of all WHO publications, or of any one publication in all countries.

7. When, because of any factor or combination of factors in point 5, a publication cannot be effectively distributed by sale, free distribution may be necessary to a varying degree in different countries in order that the publication may attain its objective.

8. Where effective distribution of WHO publications in the languages in which they are normally available is, for linguistic reasons, impossible, encouragement should be given to national commercial or non-commercial publishers to undertake the responsibility of producing editions in other languages.

The Board endorsed these postulates, which together constitute a policy of distribution that gives full flexibility to adapt the conditions for the acquisition of WHO publications to the differing needs and circumstances of each Member country. The postulates were reproduced in the reports made by the Director-General to the Board in the course of its organizational study of WHO publications in 1959-1960.[1] In the 18 years since the distribution policy for WHO publications was first formulated and accepted, there has been no significant change. During this period, the receipts from sales rose over tenfold from 1953 to over $ 344 000 in 1970. Allowing for agents' commissions, the latter figure represents a turnover of approximately $ 688 700. It is estimated that the volume of WHO publications distributed free of charge is approximately equal to that distributed by sales. Consequently, the total distribution represents a face value (i.e. a value according to the retail prices of the publications) of well over a million dollars per annum.

Nevertheless, complaints are ventilated from time to time that WHO publications are not sufficiently known by those who would most benefit from them. For example, at the twelfth session of the WHO Advisory Committee on Medical Research (ACMR), the need was expressed for:

". . . a wider distribution of the WHO Technical Report Series. Many of them, it was stressed, were extremely valuable scientifically and for public health practice, and were also very useful for teaching purposes."

It is not easy to evaluate the practical significance of such comments. Considerable efforts are made to publicize WHO publications. The WHO catalogue of publications is widely diffused, 75 000 copies in English, 25 000 in French, and 24 000 in Spanish being distributed every two to three years.

Review copies of publications are sent to approximately 1300 general and specialized journals accompanied in each case by a brief summary or descriptive notice of the publication. Reviews of WHO publications commonly appear in a large number of medical and scientific journals and these are almost invariably favourable. Some WHO publications receive editorial attention in outstanding journals or form the object of special articles and commentaries. Thus the combined circulation of journals through which WHO activities, and in particular WHO publications, are brought to the attention of readers amounts to many tens of thousands of copies in a variety of languages.

On the specific question of the distribution of the Technical Report Series, the total number of copies of each report printed varies widely. The average number of copies in 1970 was about 12 000 in English, French, Russian and Spanish. The average distribution approximately one year after publication is 4700 copies in English, (2000 copies free of

[1] Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org., 1960, No. 99, pp. 125-157.

charge), 1400 copies in French, (900 copies free of charge), 2500 copies in Russian (1000 copies free of charge), and 1000 copies in Spanish, (700 copies free of charge). There is a standing list of about 7500 scientists and scientific institutes who regularly receive such reports on one or several subjects, free of charge. A great effort is made to keep these lists up to date and to expand them.

Nevertheless, there would seem to be some who would derive benefit from the WHO Technical Report Series and other WHO technical publications but are not aware of them. However, the same could be said of the publications of any other publisher. In the developed countries, with their nationwide networks for the dissemination of literature of all kinds, those who wish to should not find it difficult to have access to WHO publications. The problem may be that some members of the biomedical community are still under the impression that the World Health Organization is primarily concerned with public health administration and the public health aspects of a small number of diseases of broad social importance - tuberculosis, malaria, and venereal diseases - as was the case in its early years of existence; it is not, perhaps, sufficiently widely known that during the last 25 years the concept of international co-operation in the field of health has radically changed and that now the field of interest of the Organization encompasses a very broad spectrum of scientific problems ranging from advanced immunology to genetics, human reproduction, biochemistry, and molecular biology. The outstanding contributions of the WHO scientific groups and the Advisory Committee on Medical Research have gone some way towards tightening the link between the Organization and the scientific community but there is obviously room for further progress in this respect.

With regard to free distribution, it needs to be more generally known that any ad hoc requests for individual WHO publications emanating from governmental institutions are met free of charge unless they are for bulk quantities, in which case the Organization offers special reduced rates. Here again the WHO regional offices and WHO representatives in various countries might play a more active role in improving the situation.

In the developing countries, serious practical difficulties may exist in obtaining access to WHO publications, and the Organization has taken some special measures to overcome these difficulties by making them available in three of the WHO regions at greatly reduced prices by payment in local currencies. However, in some countries even the reduced prices are an obstacle to effective utilization of WHO publications, and in these attempts are made to work out with the country concerned a free distribution that is at the same time rational and consistent with the budgetary limitations within which the Organization must necessarily operate.

2.1.2 WHO documents

From its inception, WHO has supplemented the supply of information in published form by the issue of technical documents of far more restricted circulation. The documents produced in WHO headquarters were originally mimeographed, but are now produced by photo-offset. They are issued in different series, identified by a symbol - e.g. WHO/MAL, WHO/VDT - followed by the last two digits of the year and a serial number. Collectively, these documents cover most of the subjects for which technical units have been established at WHO headquarters. Many of them are prepared for expert committee meetings, or meetings of scientific or study groups, but their distribution is not confined to those attending these meetings but, typically, extends to members of WHO expert advisory panels, WHO international reference centres and other collaborating laboratories and institutions, and WHO technical staff at headquarters, in regional offices and in the field. The recipients of these documents constitute - to use the term coined by Robert Boyle in 1646 - an "invisible college".

The distribution of WHO technical documents on a wider scale is not encouraged and such documents are never sent to libraries and review journals, and are not normally made available to institutions or individuals who do not have any working relationship with the Organization.

In the case of priced publications distribution is largely achieved indirectly, through pre-existing sales networks, which redistribute to individual purchasers bulk quantities provided by WHO. In the case of unpriced documents, no such redistribution channels exist, and the mailing and handling charges entailed in disseminating large numbers of them to individual recipients would be beyond the resources of the Organization.

However, all WHO technical documents are systematically screened as possible candidates for publication in the WHO Bulletin, and such of them as appear to be of more than ephemeral value are selected, in consultation with the originating technical unit, for publication, often in a revised or amplified form. Some technical documents are summarized in the WHO Chronicle. Finally, others are published in toto or with modifications in various other forms.

To the extent possible, WHO technical documents are issued in both English and French, but their volume is such that it would not be possible to produce all of them in both languages without a considerable increase in staff.

### 2.1.3 Regional publications and documents

Apart from the priced publications issued from WHO headquarters and included in the Catalogue of World Health Organization Publications, a substantial number of priced publications are issued by the Pan American Sanitary Bureau/WHO Regional Office of the Americas.

These include the Boletín de la Oficina Sanitaria Panamericana, which is now in its seventy-first volume. This journal is essentially of interest to Latin American countries, its articles being in Spanish with summaries in English, Portuguese, and French. Another regional journal, published under the joint auspices of PASB and the Pan American Federation of Associations of Medical Faculties, is the quarterly Educación Médica y Salud, which publishes articles in Spanish - again with summaries in English, Portuguese, and French.

Other publications of PASB/AMRO include a series of "Scientific Publications", most of which result from technical meetings of various kinds and are published in Spanish, often with separate editions also in English. In the seven-year period 1964-1970, 201 such publications were issued. There were also 98 of a series of Official Documents in separate English and Spanish editions, comparable to the WHO Official Records series, and various miscellaneous publications.

None of the other WHO regional offices has a programme of printed and priced publications generally available to the public by sale. They all issue not only Annual Reports of the Regional Directors and Annual Programme and Budget Proposals but also technical documents that are occasionally printed but usually reproduced by some office process. Such documents are usually reports or other products of technical meetings. They are not generally available by sale, but are distributed free of charge to participants in the meetings, to interested governments, and to qualified health workers who request copies.

## 2.2 WHO library and documentation service

### 2.2.1 The WHO library

The need for an adequate library and reference service, as an essential adjunct to the technical work of the Organization, was recognized from the earliest days of the Organization, and it was in December 1946 that the first books and periodicals were acquired and initial arrangements made to deal with urgent library requirements.

From these beginnings, the WHO library has grown rapidly, its collections keeping pace with the expanding technical work of the Organization. By the end of 1971, thanks in part to the inheritance of the library of the Office International d'Hygiène Publique, Paris, it contained over 90 000 volumes, two-thirds of which consisted of bound volumes of periodicals,

in addition to large collections of documents of WHO and the United Nations family and official governmental reports. Although a representative collection is maintained of modern books in the major languages of medical publication on most branches of medicine, special emphasis is placed on public health, communicable diseases, environmental health and the other medical specialties of particular interest to WHO. The present library accommodation can house approximately 120 000 volumes, but a continuing study is made of use, so that a planned programme of withdrawals can be effected with a view to maintaining the size of the library at a reasonable level without at the same time reducing its value to the WHO staff. A special feature is the large collection of current medical and scientific periodicals, of which 3158 were being received regularly as of October 1971, 1418 being obtained in exchange for WHO publications, 878 by subscription and 862 by gift. The international character of this collection is shown by the fact that the 3158 periodicals are published in 116 different countries or territories, 106 being Member States of the Organization.

Another collection of note is that of medical and health statistics and reports of Member States and their institutions. Approximately 2300 such reports are received annually from 162 different countries and territories, 121 being Member States.

The growth in size of the library has been accompanied by a corresponding increase in the services offered and in the use made of such services. The original conception of the WHO library as a working collection designed primarily for the use of the WHO Secretariat has had to be adjusted to the fact that it is now one of the larger collections of current medical and public health literature in the world and is called upon more and more for loans to other libraries and for the supply of photocopies of literature not easily obtainable elsewhere. In 1971 approximately 16 500 photocopies totalling over 300 000 pages were made, mostly at the request of WHO staff both at headquarters and in the regions. Over 6000 photocopies, however, were supplied to institutions in 26 Member States.

The regional structure of WHO has led to the establishment of small libraries in the regional offices, and the WHO library in Geneva functions as a central library, providing a central acquisition and cataloguing service and supplementing the local resources by loans, photocopies and assistance in dealing with reference inquiries.

A reference service on medical and public health subjects is available on request not only to WHO staff but to the medical and health departments and institutions of WHO Member States and to the United Nations and specialized agencies. A large number of inquiries are dealt with, ranging from the identification of references to the compilation of bibliographical surveys of available literature. Much of this work is of an ephemeral character, but in cases where such bibliographies might have a wider use, consideration is given, in collaboration with the relevant technical section, to publication, and a number of comprehensive bibliographies have been published in bilingual editions.

The Director-General reported in 1967[1] that it was proposed to initiate a computerized bibliographical retrieval system, using magnetic tapes provided without cost by the Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System (MEDLARS) of the National Library of Medicine of the United States of America, and a memorandum of understanding with the National Library of Medicine was signed to this effect in 1969. For a number of reasons, delays occurred in the implementation of this service, but as a result of the provision without cost to WHO of a suitable computer programme developed by the Biomedical Documentation Center of the Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden, the WHO Medlars Search Centre became operative at the beginning of 1972. The system now contains over a million and a quarter bibliographical references to the world medical literature stored on magnetic tape that will be processed in the International Computing Centre located in Geneva at the WHO headquarters.

The WHO library is also responsible for the collection, maintenance and bibliographic monitoring of all the documents and printed publications issued by WHO not only in Geneva but in the regional offices. A detailed analytical index by author, subject and country is maintained to this unique collection. That part of the index relating to WHO publications

[1] Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org., No. 158, p. 38.

is collected and published in English and French editions to form a comprehensive analytical bibliography to all articles in WHO periodicals and to all other WHO publications, including chapters by individual authors in symposia and other collected works. Three such bibliographies have been published covering the period from 1947 to 1967.

It also administers a scheme for the International Exchange of Duplicate Medical Literature, by which medical libraries notify WHO of surplus medical literature that they are prepared to donate to other libraries. From time to time lists of material offered, with the names of the donor libraries, are distributed to all participating libraries. The onus is on the individual libraries to inform each other of their requirements, WHO distributing only such of its own surplus material as has been requested. At present, 106 libraries in 43 countries participate in this scheme. Surplus material from the WHO library, Geneva, is offered first to the WHO regional offices, and by September 1971 the total number of items distributed to them and to libraries of Member countries had reached 111 330.

A distinguishing feature of the WHO library is its use as a training centre. WHO fellowships have been awarded for training or study tours for medical librarians, who often spend a considerable part of their period of study in the WHO library. Similar facilities have been made available to UNESCO and IAEA fellows.

An indirect form of medical literature service provided, on a small scale, to Members is assistance in training for medical librarianship. In one of its regions, WHO made a survey of 30 medical libraries, most of them attached to medical faculties of universities, in seven countries. This was followed by a series of three WHO courses in medical librarianship in the years 1964-1966, the last of which was held at the WHO library in Geneva. In all, 30 medical librarians from eight countries attended the courses. Surveys of medical libraries have also been made by WHO in other regions.

The most advanced example of international assistance in medical librarianship is the PAHO Regional Library of Medicine in São Paulo, Brazil. This was established as a result of a thorough two-year study of needs in biomedical communications in South America. The funds necessary for its establishment were provided by the Ministries of Health and of Education and Culture of Brazil, the United States National Library of Medicine, the Commonwealth Fund, and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). During 1970, a total of 239 bibliographic services were provided to institutions in eight Latin American countries, and short practical courses lasting from one to four weeks were attended by 26 biomedical librarians. The development of the work of the Regional Library of Medicine is guided by a Scientific Advisory Committee, which held its fourth meeting in August 1971 and recommended that the priorities for 1972 should be:

"(a) Completion and development of the library holdings.

(b) Completion of the library staff.

(c) Development of the training programme.

(d) Gradual expansion of services throughout Latin America."

2.2.2 Supply of medical literature

Medical books and journals are often provided to institutions in Member countries in support of a specific WHO-assisted project. Sometimes the supply of medical literature is a project in itself. Such projects appear in the WHO Programme and Budget for 1972 for each of the six WHO regions. WHO also procures medical literature on behalf of Members on a reimbursable basis. In 1971, the total value of purchases made by WHO under both these headings was rather more than $ 290 000.

## 3. ANALYSIS OF FUTURE ROLE OF WHO

### 3.1 WHO publications and documents services

The Board expressed its satisfaction with the way WHO's publications programme has developed over a period of 25 years. In its view, the Organization's activities in this field constitute one of the most valuable services that it can render to Member States. The present service should be expanded and improved but the character of the publications programme should not be changed except with regard to the aspects on which recommendations are made hereafter.

The Board was gratified to note that an overwhelming majority of the Member States who replied to the questionnaire expressed satisfaction with the WHO publications programme. Ninety-seven per cent. of the countries found the present coverage of WHO publications adequate. Most of the countries that believed the range of subjects might be extended would like to see more emphasis on the social and behavioural sciences and on economic aspects of health.

The Board fully shares the opinion that these are most important questions for the development of health services in many countries and they have not so far received sufficient attention, particularly in WHO publications. It therefore suggests that these questions should in future be given greater prominence in the WHO publications programme.

The Board noted that countries were almost unanimous in the opinion that the scientific level of WHO publications and the form in which they were presented were appropriate to the needs of those to whom they were directed.

However, the Board expressed concern that 40 per cent. of the responding countries were not satisfied with the free distribution of WHO publications in spite of the efforts made by the Organization in this respect and reported on in section 2.1.1.5 dealing with distribution. The Board feels that the Director-General should give careful consideration to this matter and investigate ways and means of improving both the free distribution and the sales of WHO scientific and technical publications so as to ensure that they reach the largest possible proportion of those for whom they are intended.

The Executive Board noted that, with the exception of the Bulletin, which contains original articles either in English or in French in a mixed language edition and for which a cover-to-cover translation exists in Russian, all WHO publications are published in both English and French versions and most of them are also available in Spanish and Russian. Thus, WHO publications are available to a wide readership throughout the world.

While expressing satisfaction with this policy, the Board fully appreciated the difficulties with which the Director-General is occasionally confronted in the case of highly technical and very expensive publications that it is beyond the resources of the Organization to publish within a reasonable time in more than one language. So far, the only solution found has been to arrange for the publication of such works by commercial publishers under contract. The disadvantages of this practice have, however, already been referred to in section 2.1.1.4. The Board expressed the opinion that while resolution EB2.R14 regarding languages of publication should continue to be applied as a general rule, in very exceptional cases, i.e. when a publication is so highly technical that it is essentially of interest only to highly specialized scientists, when because of its volume the cost of producing it in two or more languages would be prohibitive to the Organization, or when the delay in publishing a translation would inevitably be unduly long, there would be no objection to publication in one language only. This practice, however, should be restricted to such isolated instances and could obviously not apply to any publication forming part of a regular series, such as the Monograph Series, Technical Report Series, and the Public Health Papers.

Finally, the Board noted with interest and gratification that over a number of years translations of WHO publications have been published by government or commercial publishers in a total of 16 different languages other than those used by the Organization, thus further enhancing the value of the WHO publications programme.

Of the 30 countries whose national language is not English, French, Russian or Spanish, 11 expressed the opinion that there was a need to encourage the publication of editions in languages other than those used at present by the Organization and some indicated willingness in principle to assist in producing WHO publications in the desired language. The Board invites the Director-General to study ways in which such publication might be encouraged.

## 3.2 WHO library and documentation services

### 3.2.1 Supply of medical literature

As has been mentioned earlier, WHO is already supplying medical literature to Members on a small scale. However, over 40 per cent. of Member States replying to the questionnaire reported difficulties in obtaining medical literature, particularly periodicals. In view of the vital role played by biomedical periodicals in research, in higher medical education and in postgraduate training, it is desirable for WHO to extend its services so as to improve the availability of such periodicals in countries that are for various material reasons unable to obtain them in sufficient quantity.

The Nineteenth World Health Assembly established in 1966 a Revolving Fund "to finance, on a reimbursable basis, without service charge, requests from governments to purchase teaching and laboratory equipment for medical and paramedical education and training".[1] Governments reimburse expenditures from the fund in their local currencies, to the extent that these can be used by the Organization, and the capital of the fund amounted to $ 400 000 in 1971. The fund which has given very satisfactory results is not at present utilized for the purchase of medical periodicals or textbooks, but the Board is of the opinion that the policy governing the fund should be reviewed so as to enable it to be used for the purchase of medical literature on request for Member States.

The shortage of medical textbooks is a special problem, and one that may be considered under two aspects: (a) the supply of cheap editions of standard works, and (b) the preparation and publication of standard textbooks by WHO.

It is only in the Region of the Americas that a systematic, large-scale attempt to deal with the problem of the shortage of medical textbooks has been initiated. There the Pan American Health Organization with the help of a loan made to the Pan American Health and Education Foundation by the Inter-American Development Bank has started a programme to supply textbooks on some 22 subjects covered in the teaching of medicine at a low cost on cash or credit to 100 000 medical students in approximately 150 medical schools and faculties in Latin America. According to a report in September 1971,[2] 62 417 copies of textbooks of pathology, biochemistry, physiology, pharmacology and paediatrics have been distributed to 110 participating medical faculties. The total money collected amounted to $ 310 142.

As replies to the questionnaire made clear, however, it is not only in the Region of the Americas that a shortage of textbooks is an acute hardship to medical education. Nearly 70 per cent. of replying countries favoured some sort of WHO action in improving the supply, and the Board therefore believes that serious consideration should be given to the possibility of developing similar programmes in other WHO regions.

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[1] Handbook of Resolutions and Decisions, 11th ed., p. 370, resolution WHA19.7.

[2] PAHO document CD20/5.

As concerns the preparation and publication of textbooks by the Organization itself, the Board is of the opinion that this is an ambitious project that before any decision could be taken would require a thorough feasibility study in the light of such considerations as (a) whether a programme for internationally acceptable medical textbooks is realistic; and (b) the financial implications of establishing a machinery for selecting subjects and authors of textbooks, approving texts, printing large numbers of copies, and keeping them up to date by new editions.

On the other hand, the publication by WHO of basic guides or manuals for auxiliary health personnel would present fewer difficulties, and would certainly be of great value particularly in faculties of health sciences designed for the joint education of the various members of the health team. Such texts might well be adapted to specific regional conditions and published in local languages by national health administrations.

3.2.2 Medical library services

The problem of the supply of medical textbooks is predominantly a financial one. With the medical literature that is of major importance for medical research, medical specialization, and higher medical education - i.e. the medical journals - the problem is more complex. Adequate access to the medical periodical literature implies adequate library organization, since neither the medical research worker nor the medical specialist can have personal copies of all the journals of potential interest to him. It follows that, in the absence of adequate medical library organization, such supplies of medical periodical literature as are available are not used to the extent possible.

In this context, the situation in the different Member countries of WHO may be broadly classified into three categories:

In some countries, there is no shortage of medical literature, and there is good medical library organization, with arrangements for inter-library loans, union catalogues and photocopying services, in some cases with advanced automated bibliographical services.

In others, there is no absolute shortage of medical literature, but inadequate medical library organization hinders its full utilization. Where this is the case, the typical picture is that each department of the medical faculty has its own collection of books and periodicals, there being no or an inadequate central medical library, and no union catalogue of the holdings of all departments. In such a situation the Organization can usefully provide medical library consultant services, with special reference to the organization of central medical libraries, union catalogues, and modern methods of reprography. With the increasing sophistication of the methodology of medical librarianship and, especially, the development of automated systems of information storage and retrieval, the organization of training courses in specialized techniques for senior medical librarians should form part of the regular programme of the Organization.

In most developing countries there is not only an absolute lack of medical literature, including both journals and textbooks, but medical library organization is rudimentary and a cadre of trained medical librarians does not exist. In such a situation, assistance not only in the provision of medical literature but in the organization of medical libraries and in the training of medical librarians is required.

The development of modern reprographic methods makes it possible, however, for a central or regional medical library to serve a wide area, subject to adequacy of communications, without duplicating holdings of any but an essential core of medical periodical literature in peripheral libraries. The example of the Region of the Americas is instructive, for, as mentioned in section 2.2.1, PAHO has co-sponsored in São Paulo, Brazil, the establishment of a regional medical library for the Latin American countries. The impact that this new

library has already had on the problems of biomedical communications in that area may be judged by the large number of favourable references to its services made in replies to the questionnaire. It must be emphasized that the effective use of published biomedical information today depends very largely on the existence of an effective network of biomedical libraries and other scientific establishments with well-trained librarians and staff experienced in communication technology, effective arrangements for inter-library loans, efficient photocopying services and access to computer-based systems for information retrieval. The Board believes that the concept of a regional medical library based upon an existing medical library but serving a wider area is a sound and realistic one, and that the other WHO regional offices with the direct assistance of headquarters should study seriously the feasibility of encouraging and providing expert assistance for the establishment of similar regional libraries in their areas.

Any WHO assistance in medical library organization can hardly fail to take into account the necessity of ensuring the adequate training of medical librarians, whether by fellowships, training courses, seminars, or a combination of these. The Board considers that medical librarianship should be given a more prominent place in WHO's training activities.

### 3.2.3 WHO MEDLARS Centre

An ancillary form of medical literature service to Members is the provision on request of bibliographical information and, when appropriate, photocopies, microfilm, or microfiches of selected journal articles. This activity is at present on a very small scale, but it is interesting to note from replies to the questionnaire that more than 40 per cent. of Members reported difficulties in obtaining photocopies of biomedical articles, while for bibliographical reference lists the proportion was more than 50 per cent.

The inauguration early in 1972 of a MEDLARS Search Centre (see section 2.2.1) at WHO headquarters should substantially improve this situation. The expanded facilities made possible by MEDLARS will be made available in the first instance to WHO staff at headquarters, in the regional offices, and in the field, and to such members of WHO Expert Advisory Panels and national institutes as were not served by a national or regional MEDLARS centre. It should not, however, be overlooked that the MEDLARS product consists of bibliographical citations only, and the effective exploitation of the system implies the commitment of manpower to the production of photocopies of articles of special interest, for to the field worker far removed from adequate medical libraries, a mere list of bibliographical citations is useless.

In view of these new services, it is suggested that no further measures should be considered for assisting Members to obtain photocopies and bibliographical lists until such time as it is possible to evaluate qualitatively and quantitatively the results obtained by the WHO MEDLARS Centre, as well as to assess the success in the development of regional medical libraries and their role in meeting needs.

However, it would be unrealistic to expect WHO documentation services to be able to meet worldwide needs on all aspects of biomedical science and public health. Nor is it expedient for the Organization to attempt such a task. The long-term strategy calls for decentralization, for the establishment of national and regional co-ordinated networks of medical libraries and documentation centres, and it is in the encouragement and co-ordination of and support to such networks that the role of WHO lies.

The MEDLARS operations of the National Library of Medicine have been decentralized both as regards input, that is, the indexing of periodical literature for inclusion in the system, and the output of bibliographical lists, which is undertaken by a number of MEDLARS centres throughout the world. The Board believes that the WHO MEDLARS Centre should develop and implement a plan not only for the actual utilization of MEDLARS but for the preparation of bibliographical products, particularly in public health information, that would be of assistance and benefit to national health administrations throughout the world.

Another area in which the Board believed that WHO could provide valuable assistance to medical libraries internationally is in the preparation and publication of an international list of current medical periodicals. The need for such a list is now urgent as it is understood that the World Medical Association has decided not to publish any further editions of World Medical Periodicals, the first edition of which was sponsored by UNESCO and WHO.

3.2.4 Co-ordination with other systems

Finally, there is the question whether WHO should take the initiative in promoting the the co-ordination of the major automated biomedical information systems. Although over 80 per cent. of replies to this question were affirmative, it would seem that many countries interpreted the question as referring to general improvements in the supply of medical literature and/or the organization of medical library services. Moreover, it should not be overlooked that there is a proposal framed under the joint auspices of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) and UNESCO for a World Science Information System (UNISIST), the ultimate aim of which is to obtain co-ordination and compatibility of the major automated information systems, including those concerned with the biomedical field.

In October 1971, UNESCO convened an Intergovernmental Conference for the Establishment of a World Science Information System (UNISIST), which drew up recommendations to the Director-General of UNESCO, and called upon "other Agencies of the family of the United Nations . . . to lend their full support and co-operation . . ." in the development of UNISIST. The proposals of this intergovernmental conference will be considered at the next General Conference of UNESCO in the autumn of 1972. The Board believes that until such time as the UNESCO General Conference had decided what action it will take on the proposals, it would be inadvisable for WHO to do more than continue to keep closely in touch with the development of UNISIST, and affirm its willingness to lend such support and co-operation as are appropriate and feasible in the co-ordination of the biomedical elements of UNISIST. However, WHO should reserve its position as concerns the overall general co-ordination of biomedical documentation services pending the review of the role of WHO in relation to modern developments in biomedical communications by an international group of experts.

ANNEX 1

DRAFT RESOLUTION PREPARED BY THE WORKING GROUP

The Executive Board,

Recalling resolutions WHA23.26[1] and WHA24.37[2] by which the World Health Assembly requested the Executive Board to study medical literature services to Members;

Having considered the report of the Working Group to which the Board, at its forty-seventh session, had entrusted the detailed examination of the matter;

1. TRANSMITS to the Twenty-fifth World Health Assembly the organizational study on "Medical literature services to Members";[3]

2. INVITES the attention of the Assembly to the findings of the study; and

3. RECOMMENDS to the Assembly that it adopt the following resolution:

The Twenty-fifth World Health Assembly,

Having examined the report of the Executive Board on its organizational study "Medical literature services to Members";

Noting that the study was carried out on the basis of the replies by Member States to a questionnaire,

EXPRESSES its belief that the World Health Organization should assume a leading role in the development, co-ordination, and improvement of biomedical communications, particularly in those fields of major concern to national health services and to international co-operation in the field of health;

REQUESTS the Director-General to examine the conclusions that emerged from the study and from the discussions of the Board at its forty-ninth session with particular attention to the following:

(a) the need to give more prominence in the publications programme to the social and behavioural sciences and to the economic aspects of health;

(b) ways and means of improving both the free distribution and the sales of WHO scientific and technical publications;

(c) the need for a feasibility study on whether the Organization should prepare and publish medical textbooks;

(d) the importance of an improvement in medical library services for the effective use of published biomedical information, and particularly the development of regional medical libraries;

(e) the necessity for a study by an international group of experts of the role of WHO in relation to modern problems of biomedical communications; and

REQUESTS the Director-General to report thereon to a later session of the Executive Board and a subsequent World Health Assembly.

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[1] Handbook of Resolutions and Decisions, 11th ed., p. 444.

[2] Off. Rec. Wld Hlth Org., No. 193, pp. 19-20.

[3] Document EB49/WP/18.