



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

EXECUTIVE BOARD
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Report on the forty-second session of the Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR)

Report by the Secretariat

1. This document provides a brief summary of the deliberations of the global ACHR at its forty-second session (Geneva, 3 to 5 May, 2004). A full report of the session is available on request.
2. Some regional offices held scientific events during 2002-2004 related to the report of ACHR on **genomics and health**.¹ ACHR suggested that an expert committee could be established in this area.
3. In reviewing the report on **knowledge for better health**,² the Committee noted that it offers a major opportunity to highlight the need for more research into health systems and for more emphasis on the translation of knowledge into actions that can improve people's health. These are areas of research that have been relatively neglected.
4. Information was provided on the **health research systems analysis** initiative. This initiative aims to work closely with countries to develop methodologies that will enable them to monitor health research activities through the collection of core data and information on the key health research system functions of stewardship, financing, creating and sustaining resources, and production and utilization of knowledge. The Committee welcomed the progress made, the involvement of WHO regional offices and the formation of national task forces in participating countries.
5. The Committee commented on a proposal from the Swedish International Development Agency to **map research activities within WHO**. Such a review should not be a one-off, but a continuing, sustainable activity. It should be evaluative in nature (for example, identifying the extent of dissemination of research findings or of capacity building).
6. A presentation was also made on initial steps to frame an Organization-wide research policy. A process and task force have been established for this purpose.
7. With regard to **regional health research activities**, areas of emphasis of the African Advisory Committee for Health Research and Development include ethics, traditional medicine and noncommunicable diseases. The Advisory Committee on Health Research of the Pan American Health

¹ *Genomics and world health: report of the Advisory Committee on Health Research*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2002.

² *World report on knowledge for better health. Strengthening health systems*. Geneva, World Health Organization. In press.

Organization continues to focus on interinstitutional links, knowledge management and dissemination, and projects in specific areas such as ageing and virology. The Eastern Mediterranean Advisory Committee on Health Research gives special attention to ethics, the potential of biotechnology for health (including establishment of a regional network), national health research systems, and dissemination of health information. The European Advisory Committee on Health Research has a specific focus on the use of evidence in policy development. The WHO South-East Asia Advisory Committee on Health Research continues to give attention to ethics, priority-setting methodology, and mapping of national health-research systems. It also has activities in specific areas such as thalassemia and emerging infectious diseases. The Western Pacific Advisory Committee on Health Research has subcommittees active in several areas, including data collection on research activities in the Western Pacific Region.

8. Discussing the importance of **health systems and operational research**, the Committee noted the current major challenges facing health systems in relation to building up human resources, achieving universal coverage, and integrating disease-specific programmes into the broader health system. Much more research was needed on those critical issues, and work on the health systems agenda should be better integrated into other WHO activities.

9. Information was provided on a new **global health research** initiative which intends to establish a virtual network of national health research councils from the major developed and developing countries.

10. ACHR held a second, informal meeting on 20 November 2004 during the Ministerial Summit on Health Research in Mexico City.¹ The Committee discussed the future focus of its work on improving the use of evidence in WHO's recommendations, advice, guidelines and technical activities, and the Alliance for Health Systems and Policy Research.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

11. The Board is invited to note the report.

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¹ See document EB115/30.