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منظمة الصحة العالمية  
المكتب الإقليمي  
لشرق البحر المتوسط

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PROGRESS OF WHO-SPONSORED RESEARCH ACTIVITIES  
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

**PROGRESS OF WHO-SPONSORED RESEARCH ACTIVITIES  
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION  
(Agenda item 4)**

WHO/EMRO has taken several initiatives in furthering research intended to solve health problems and contribute to the implementation of the WHO programme.

Ministry of Health focal points for research, as well as those in charge of health research participated in the sixth intercountry meeting of national officers responsible for health research held in Cairo, Egypt, from 27 to 29 August 1994. Most of their recommendations related to mechanisms to increase awareness about health systems research (HSR) among decision-makers and senior officials. This, they thought, should be a continuous process because of the rapid turnover of decision-makers in some countries and because of the new developments in the subject. They also recommended to search for new mechanisms to increase research funds.

The increase in the number of research proposals received in EMRO for support is a very positive sign. About one third of the proposals were found worthy of support. It is unfortunate that most of those who applied did not select research problems from among the EMR priorities, while others did not know how to write research proposals. It is thus recommended that countries hold workshops on research methodology and the writing of research protocols.

During 1994, a total of US\$81 622 was spent on seven research projects. They covered areas in HSR, epidemiological research, clinical studies in non-communicable diseases, community participation, MCH and environmental research.

Both technical and financial support was given to national activities such as meetings to draw up policies and strategies, the orientation of decision-makers and health workers, and assistance in identifying research priorities and strategies.

It is, however, regrettable to report that such activities are only performed in a few countries of the Region.

EMRO's Task Force for Health Research has on one occasion visited the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya on another. This mechanism is very useful in activating research and getting researchers from different institutions together with the Ministries of Health. In practice, they often agree on a sustainable system for promotion and programme for research.

It is also satisfying to see a growing interest in designation of institutions of excellence in the Region as WHO Collaborating Centres. In 1994/95, five new centres were thus designated, to bring the total number to 48 WHO Collaborating Centres in the EMR.

In order to interest young scientists in research, WHO/EMRO has announced prizes in health research and health systems research. In response

to this call, 39 young men and women have applied. It was a hard competition and stringent criteria for selection were applied.

Dr Fathy Sherif from the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya won the prize on health research for his work entitled "Biochemical and clinical study of gamma-aminobutyrate aminotransferase (GABA-T) and monamine oxide (MAO) activities in the brain and blood platelets".

Dr Sabine Fatima Khan from Pakistan won the prize for health systems research for her work entitled "Acceptability of cervical cancer screening in five squatter settlements in Karachi—a qualitative and quantitative pilot study".

The Eastern Mediterranean Advisory Committee on Health Research (EM/ACHR) held its 18th meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia from 20 to 22 March 1995. The Committee reviewed with satisfaction the activities in research promotion and strategies, commended them and passed several recommendations that will strengthen research at both national and regional levels. Of these recommendations one should be stressed in particular: in order to enable researchers benefit from research grants, countries are requested to hold frequent workshops on research methodology and protocol writing.

In addition, the Committee discussed the following topics, for priority consideration in future:

- The dissemination and utilization of research results
- Viral hepatitis C and E
- Ethical aspects of health research. In this respect, countries are recommended to establish competent ethical review committees with clear guidelines
- Psychosocial aspects of hereditary diseases and genetic counselling
- Report on the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases/HQ and its joint activities with WHO/EMRO, which are particularly active in operational research on diseases pertinent to the Region, such as malaria, schistosomiasis and leishmaniasis.