Non-proprietary drug names

As the same drug is often sold under many different privately-owned commercial trade names, there is a need to identify each drug substance by a unique, universally available and accepted generic name that can be used in the labelling and advertising of medicinal products in international commerce.

For over 30 years, WHO has selected international non-proprietary names (INN) by coordinating the activities of national drug nomenclature commissions. Instances where official national generic names are different from the INN are now exceptional. To date, some 5,700 names have been published in 60 lists of international proprietary names.

The INN are maintained by the Pharmaceutical Unit of WHO’s Division of Drug Management and Policies on a computerised database operated on a mainframe computer in Geneva. This was one of the first computer applications developed by WHO in the early 1960s. Today, the computerised database simplifies the regular publication of the Cumulative List of International Non-proprietary Names.

Member governments as well as private corporations use the database to identify new international non-proprietary names and as a reference related to the use of trademarks. This information is currently distributed to WHO’s member governments and is available in hard copy or on computer tapes. Users of the INN system may in future have access to on-line query facilities of the database, which may also be available on CD-ROM disks.

Informatics and Telematics in Health

The new science of informatics – the science of dissemination of information by computers – public health. Here are just three examples of technology to share information with its 166
national coordination activities in the field of water and sanitation. The system is a sector management tool designed for governments and external support agencies. Its purpose is to improve the management of water and sanitation projects in developing countries. It was developed to run on microcomputers by WHO's Division of Information Systems Support (ISS) at WHO.

Collecting information about continuing and multilateral funding institutions, UN agencies, and donor preparation come both from the agencies and from operating in the sector to share information regularly, so that overlap can be avoided. It should soon be feasible for systems. Meanwhile, data from agencies with manual record form, for manual entry by WHO. CESI output is also on computer diskettes.

**Sources of food contamination**

The joint UNEP/FAO/WHO Food Contamination Monitoring Programme studies the contamination of food by chemical agents arising from environmental and industrial pollution, from agricultural technology, from food processing practices and from natural sources. Information on contamination from all these sources is collected at 37 collaborating centres throughout the world and forwarded to the WHO Environmental Health (EHE) Programme in Geneva for inclusion in a computer database maintained by the Information Systems Support (ISS) Division of WHO.

Since its inception in 1979, the database has grown to its present volume of more than 7,000 records on contaminants in food. The system currently accounts for more than 1,200 food types, and a number of contaminants among which are pesticides, phosphates, lead, mercury and tin. The system records the results of food sampling by the collaborating laboratories. Data items reflect the name of the food, the contaminant, year of sampling, origin of the food, the number of samples analysed, the detection limit and median, and the minimum and maximum measurements of the contaminant detected. The database is used by national health authorities, and in particular public health laboratories, to compare test results and conditions in other countries. The Food Safety unit of WHO's EHE Division produces printed status reports on food contamination every two years which are distributed to all member states.

The database and attendant system software are maintained and operated on a large mainframe computer in Geneva. The possibility of providing remote users with access to the database, either through on-line query facilities or on CD-ROM diskettes, or both, is presently being explored.