

Work of WHO

1

Prevention and Control of Specific Diseases

Almost all communicable diseases are or have been at sometime the subject of WHO activities. The global eradication of smallpox is an outstanding example of international health cooperation. With the same energy and commitment with which WHO eradicated smallpox, it is now directing the global battle against poliomyelitis.

An important activity, of WHO is epidemiological surveillance of communicable diseases. The WHO collects and disseminates epidemiological information on diseases subject to International Health Regulations and occasionally other communicable diseases of international importance through an Automatic Telex Reply Service (ATRS) and the "Weekly Epidemiological Record" (WER). The latter contains more complete details and brief reviews of communicable diseases of international importance. Member States can also make use of the "WHO Emergency Scheme for Epidemics" whenever necessary. The aim of International Health Regulations is to ensure maximum security against international spread of diseases with the minimum interference with world traffic.

The WHO has also paid attention in its programme of work to non-communicable disease problems such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, genetic disorders, diabetes, blindness, mental disorders, drug addiction and dental diseases.

The activities of WHO have also branched out into the fields of vector biology and control, immunology, quality control of drugs and biological products, drug evaluation and monitoring and health laboratory technology as these activities are relevant to the control of both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Immunization against common diseases of childhood (Expanded Programme on Immunization) is now a priority programme of the WHO.

2

Development of Comprehensive Health Services

WHO's most important single function is to promote and support national health policy development and the development of comprehensive national health programmes. This broad field of endeavour encompasses a wide variety of activities such as organizing health systems based on primary health care, the development of health manpower and utilization, building of long-term national capability, particularly in the areas of health infrastructure development, and managerial capabilities (including monitoring and evaluation) and health services research. Appropriate Technology for Health (ATH) is another new programme launched by the WHO to encourage selfsufficiency in solving health problems. The new programme is part of WHO's efforts to build up primary health care.

3

Family Health

Family health is one of the major programme activities of WHO since 1970, and is broadly subdivided into maternal and child health care, human reproduction, nutrition and health education. The chief concern is improvement of the quality of life of the family as a unit.

4

Environmental Health

Promotion of environmental health has always been an important activity of WHO. WHO advises governments on national programmes for the provision of basic sanitary services. The activities are directed to protection of the quality of air, water and food; health conditions of work radiation protection and early identification of new hazard~ originating from new technological developments. A number of programmes have been developed such as the 'WHO Environmental Health Criteria Programme' and 'WHO Environmental Health Monitoring Programme' towards improving environmental health.

5

Health Statistics

From its earliest days in 1947, WHO has been concerned with the dissemination of a wide variety of morbidity and mortality statistics relating to health problems. The data is published in the
(a) Weekly Epidemiological Record
(b) World Health Statistics Quarterly and
(c) World Health Statistics Annual.

Readers interested in current data may obtain it from the Chief Statistician, Dissemination of Statistical Information, WHO, Geneva. In order that statistics from different countries may be comparable, WHO publishes 'International Classification of Diseases' which is updated every 10th year. The Tenth Revision of ICD came into effect from 1st January 1993. Assistance is also given to countries in the improvement of their medical records, and in the planning and operating national health information systems.

6

Biomedical Research

The WHO does not itself do research, but stimulates and coordinates research work. It has established a world-wide network of WHO collaborating centres, besides awarding grants to research workers and research institutions for promoting research. There are Regional Advisory Committees on health research which define regional health research priorities and a Global Advisory Committee which in close collaboration with the regional committee deals with policy issues of global import. Six tropical diseases (malaria, schistosomiasis, trypanosomiasis, filariasis, leishmaniasis and leprosy) are the target of the WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases to develop new tools, strengthen research institutions and training workers in the countries affected.

7

Health Literature and Information

WHO acts as a clearing house for information on health problems. Its publications comprise hundreds of titles on a wide variety of health subjects. The WHO library is one of the satellite centres of the Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System (MEDLARS) of the U.S. National Library of Medicine. MEDLARS is fully computerised indexing system covering the whole of medicine on an international basis. The WHO has also a public information service both at headquarters and each of the six regional offices.

7

Cooperation with Other Organizations

WHO collaborates with the UN and with the other specialized agencies, and maintains various degrees of working relationships. Besides, WHO has also established relations with a number of international governmental organizations.