

17th Pugwash Conference on Science and World AffairsRonneby, Sweden, 3-8 September 1967

M. Kaplan^{x)}
(USA)

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION IN HEALTH AND BIOMEDICAL
RESEARCH AS PART OF A WORLD SCIENCE CENTRE

The Pugwash Conferences have been aware of the great need for a marked intensification of research activities in health and biomedicine, not only for bringing more immediate positive benefits to all countries of the world, but also to avoid long-range serious consequences if such efforts are not undertaken. These problems include environmental contamination (chemical and biological mutagens), mental illness, chronic degenerative disorders (notably cancer and cardiovascular disease), human genetics, communicable disease control, nutrition, and rapid urbanization. Apart from the purely biological and medical aspects of these problems, studies of their social and economic implications, especially for developing countries, are for the most part in a primitive state.

The scientific justifications for a concerted attack on the above set of problems were elaborated in the proposal for a World Health Research Centre drafted by groups of distinguished scientists, and which was considered by the World Health Assembly (WHO) in 1965. A relatively large, scientifically autonomous, centralized effort allied to WHO, and operating in close liaison with national, university and other research laboratories was recommended; this was done because the research requirements could not be met effectively by individual, bilateral or regional groupings of countries. The major part of the proposal was shelved principally because of financial considerations, and other objections were of secondary importance. The scientific rationale for the Centre was on the whole accepted, although the Assembly was unwilling to undertake at that time the establishment of direct operations in biomedical laboratory research. The final outcome was that the Assembly approved in 1966 the establishment of a new research division to undertake work on a very modest scale (0.5 million dollars annually) on two of the three components of the original Centre proposal - epidemiology and communications science. Present national and international research efforts remain grossly insufficient, therefore, and are not suited for

^{x)} Dr Kaplan is a staff member of the World Health Organization. He prepared this paper in his private capacity as a USA scientist, however, because of the personal opinions expressed.