

Editorial: The International Scene

The main theme of the General Assembly for the World Health Organization in 1975 will be 'Social and Health Aspects of Sexually-Transmitted Diseases: the Need for a Better Approach.' In anticipation of the Assembly a meeting of clinicians, public health workers, educationists, and others was held in Geneva in November, 1974, and a report of the discussions and recommendations of this international group will be available to delegates attending the General Assembly. During the past few years there has been considerable progress in the international field and a review of some of these events may be appropriate at the present time.

The section concerned with sexually-transmitted diseases and treponematoses of the World Health Organization is very active under its new Chief, Dr. G. Causse. It has concerned itself principally with the organization of technical meetings, expert committees, working groups, and help to developing countries. It has also been responsible for the publication and wide circulation of technical documents. The Regional Office for Europe in Copenhagen has recently published a European Directory of VD treatment centres in the European region (WHO, 1973). The WHO works closely with many international organizations throughout the world, especially non-governmental organizations.

One of these is the International Union against the Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses. The executive committee of this organization includes representatives from many countries and most regions of the world and meets annually to discuss problems and propose solutions to them. The Union holds a General Assembly at least twice every 5 years and resolutions adopted at the assembly are sent to governments, health authorities, and the WHO. For many years the Union and the WHO have worked together in close co-operation and the Union has put forward many ideas to the WHO, the majority of which have led to fruitful action. The next General Assembly of the Union will take place in Malta on April 13 to 18, 1975.

In 1972 a working party was set up by the European Public Health Committee of the Council of Europe to consider the problem of the venereal diseases. In 1973 a report entitled 'Sexually-Transmitted Diseases: Scope and Control Measures' was prepared by Dr. T. Guthe and was presented to the European Public Health Committee by Drs. T. Guthe and C. S. Nicol (Guthe, 1974). The Committee accepted the report and as a result a resolution on the control of sexually-transmitted diseases was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on February 27, 1974 (see p. 3).

The term sexually-transmitted diseases is used throughout the resolution, which recommends to member states the harmonization of rules and regulations concerning communicable diseases, improvements in case-finding, the provision of free diagnostic, therapeutic, and other services, the improvement of standards of diagnosis, treatment, and social services, and the strengthening and upgrading of professional training. It also proposes the promotion of increased medical research in Europe, newer approaches to health education, progressive development of control of sexually-transmitted diseases, and the long-term assessment of the medical, social, and economic consequences of the diseases, together with surveillance of the national trends in incidence and inter-country spread in Europe.

Meanwhile the Monospecialty Committee on Dermatovenereology of the European Economic Community has been meeting at regular intervals to discuss the organization of the services in the nine member countries of the Common Market and to try to establish principles, which will result in harmonization of specialist training, the establishment of a specialist register, and the eventual free movement of specialists from one country to another if it is so desired. There are obviously many difficulties in achieving these aims, not the least of them being that the United Kingdom is the only country where the sexually-transmitted diseases comprise a separate specialty totally independent of dermatology and where the service available to the public is more sophisticated than in the other eight member countries. Nevertheless, after receiving a detailed report on the organization of the service in the United Kingdom and a separate report on the training of specialists in sexually-transmitted diseases, the committee approved a resolution that the eventual establishment of a separate specialty in sexually-transmitted diseases was a desirable development in the Community.

Many countries have their own organizations which attempt to encourage measures to control the incidence of the diseases. For example, the British Federation against the Venereal Diseases has an elected committee which meets twice a year and has close contact with the Department of Health and Social Security, the Health Education Council, and the International Union against the Venereal Diseases and Treponematoses. In the United States of America, the American Social Health Association plays a similar role, and there are many other such organizations, such as the Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechts Krankheiten in Germany.

The Medical Society for the Study of Venereal Diseases in London, however, has a unique position in the world. It is a society composed of doctors and selected scientists, devoted entirely to the study and discussion of problems related to the sexually-transmitted diseases. A proportion of its 450 or so members are from overseas and some of them attend the regular meetings held in London and the annual spring meeting held elsewhere in the United Kingdom or abroad. The Society produces with the help of the British Medical Association the *British Journal of Venereal Diseases*, which is published six times a year.

Recently the American Venereal Diseases Association has taken on a new lease of life and in September, 1974, it published the first number of a new periodical entitled the *Journal of the American Venereal Diseases Association*, which is to be published four times a year. Furthermore, the Pan-American Health Organization, which is the Regional Office of the WHO in Washington, D.C., has published the full Report of the International Travelling Seminar in the U.S.A. (PAHO, 1974). The international group which comprised this seminar travelled widely throughout the United States in 1971 studying the problems of the sexually-transmitted diseases and the services available to deal with them. Its comments were partially incorporated in the report of the National Commission on Venereal Diseases, which was established by the Congress of the United States

to make recommendations to deal with the situation. The National Commission has now delivered its report to the U.S. Congress and the results are awaited with interest.

The sexually-transmitted diseases are the most international of all the diseases affecting mankind. No country can establish control of their incidence within its own borders unless other states do the same, and standards of clinical diagnosis, treatment, contact-tracing, and health education are comparable throughout the world. This is not the case today and much work remains to be done to establish acceptable standards in as many countries as possible. Existing international organizations provide a satisfactory framework on which to build for the future, but recognition of the problems and the will to try to overcome them are the essential prerequisites of success.

References

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