

Trip Report
Network of Centers of Excellence in Primary Care in the
Americas
December 11-13, 2007

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Introduction

The purpose of the meeting in Belo Horizonte was to create a formal network of Centres of Excellence in Primary Care to collaborate with the countries of the region of the Americas in renewing primary health care by strengthening the primary care basis of their health systems.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Set up the basis to create an international network of centers of excellence on PHC
- Develop a proposal for a research agenda on PHC which will be taken to a Regional Consultation in 2008
- Observe some experiences of family health in Brazil and in particular in Belo Horizonte

The main focus of the network will be the health systems aspects of primary health care with a focus on developing and disseminating the evidence base through applied research, policy analysis, and dissemination of best practices. A particular area of focus will be the interface between primary care and specialty, hospital, and diagnostic care.

This first meeting of this network was sponsored by PAHO and Brazil representatives, both at a national and local level. Participants from Brazil, Argentina, Columbia, the United States and Canada were identified according to their background and contacts with those engaged in primary health care research.

The Canadian Delegation was composed of:

- Ronald Labonté, Canada Research Chair, Globalization Health Equity, Institute of Population Health

- Greg Webster, Director, Research and Indicator Development, Canadian Institute for Health Information
- Kate Dickson, International Affairs Directorate, Health Canada

Ronald Labonté was part of a panel entitled: *Evidence and research on PHC around the world: What we know and what we don't know: a critical view of research*. He summarized some of the key findings to date of the international comprehensive primary health care study (funded by the Canadian Global Health Research Initiative) which he co-leads.

Kate Dickson presented on the panel entitled: *PHC Network Experiences: What is a network? How do they work? What are their purposes and achievements?* Examples of networks that are (or have been) engaged in research across Canada in order to create opportunities for researchers and decision-makers to share research results included:

- i) Evaluations and results of the Primary Health Care Transition Fund and the inter-professional education for collaborative patient centered practice (IECPCP)
- ii) Canadian Coalition for Health Promotion Research
- iii) Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), and the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation
- iv) Canadian Institute of Health Information and the Global Health Research Initiative.

Emphasis was placed on Canada's approach to network and coalition-building through consultations, development of framework strategies, implementation models and means to monitor and evaluate. Different forms of networks for research were also highlighted as well as a few diverse funding mechanisms.

Greg Webster presented on CIHI's experiences in developing the primary health care indicators which provided food for thought amongst the participants. Copies of the two volumes were also distributed.

Discussion and Conclusions

Much discussion took place on how an international collaborative network would operate, what its mandate would be and who would take the lead. It was agreed it would be a network of Institutions/ Organizations with a strong primary health care background from the Academic field or health system. It would be international in scope, and be open to any institutions interested in joining the network. It would start modestly and grow incrementally.

The **overall goal** of the network would be to improve the health of the population and equity in health throughout the Region of the Americas, while the general objective is to strengthen health systems based on PHC. The **operational objectives** would be to:

1. mobilize funds for research on primary health care
2. carry out rigorous research
3. make PHC more influential, partly by also making it more comparable
4. collaborate across boundaries of the countries
5. share results and tools
6. generate new knowledge on PHC identifying the main topics to be studied

A steering committee was agreed to be composed of the following:

- Pan American Health Organization
- Brazil: Ministry of Health
- Johns Hopkins University & Medical Institutions, University of New York
- Escuela Andaluza de Salud Pública
- Fundació Jordi Gol (Brazil)
- Sociedad Española de Medicina Familiar y Comunitaria.
- Health Canada
- WONCA (World Family Doctors Caring for People) ¹

It was agreed that the specific functions of the network include:

- i) dissemination of research and evidence on PHC with a view to generating new knowledge;
- ii) support to policymakers in their decision making process;
- iii) provision of technical cooperation wherever relevant; iv) facilitation of the capacity to provide the means for greater comparability among the countries, even beyond the region of the Americas

Preliminary topics for research would include:

- i) a set of indicators to evaluate PHC;
- ii) strategies to achieve greater equity and effectiveness;
- iii) assessment of best practices;
- iv) evaluation and dissemination of diverse management models;
- v) assessment of the various components of successful community health

It was agreed that next steps would encompass

- i) The identification of potential collaborating institutions and other networks in the countries and their insertion into the defined lines of work mentioned above
- ii) Participation of the members at the Canadian Conference in International Health (CCIH) (October 2008)

¹ Physicians with a common interest in general practice/family medicine and all its variants.

- iii) Development of a work plan for the next two years, aimed at giving continuity to a plan of actions to be performed by the parts and resource mobilization.
- iv) Development of a webpage as a home for the Network to facilitate the exchange of experiences, allow for virtual consultancy and stimulate discussion around a common schedule of activities and events.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As Health Canada is being invited to sit on the Steering Committee, participation includes a representative from the Primary Care Division and health human resources division.

The report should be disseminated to CIHR, CIHI, and the Coalition for Health Promotion Research, the Institute of Population Health Institute and their networks of PHC oriented research affiliates across the country.