

BASIC HEALTH SERVICES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

A well-attended International Colloquium on basic health services in developing countries was held at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, 8–10 December 1978. Although specific health hazards (such as leprosy) were not studied in the presentations or working groups, the implications for leprosy treatment and control of the broad principles discussed were never far from the minds of the two leprologists who attended, the President and Secretary respectively (Prof. M. F. Lechat and Dr S. G. Browne) of The International Leprosy Association.

Following current trends and fashions in terminology and concepts, the colloquium considered such matters as coverage of the population concerned, rural or urban, and participation of the general public in making decisions about and taking responsibility for, the health services they need. Participants were not deceived by the politically-motivated slogans and catchphrases that have recently achieved wide publicity, nor deluded by some current assumptions that intractable problems can be solved by repetition of a few emotive words or phrases.

It was insisted that health professionals should themselves be open to the expressed needs of the populations they serve, and that their responsibilities as team-leaders are likely to increase rather than diminish as the “basic health workers” come to be recruited, trained, supervised and linked with a central referring authority.

Leprosy is a chronic disease that may fail to obtain the attention it deserves, and its share of resources and skilled man-hours, since in many countries it still lacks a popular image that it is recognizable in the early stages and can be arrested before deformity has occurred. Without over-emphasizing its importance in any given situation, leprosy calls for an increasing vigilance on the part of all those whose main concern it is.

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