

Opening Remarks

By
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At

***First Meeting of the Task Force on Health Research
Management and Capacity Building***

WHO/SEARO, New Delhi
6-7 March 2008

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**DR SAMLEE PLIANBANGCHANG
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, WHO SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

Task Force members, special invitees and all other participants, ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you all to the first meeting of the Task Force on Health Research Management and Capacity Building. At the outset, I thank you for sparing time to attend the meeting in spite of your very busy schedules at home.

The Task Force on Health Research and Capacity Building has been created in pursuance of a recommendation of the 30th session of the WHO/South-East Asia Advisory Committee on Health Research. The ACHR has always underlined the undisputed importance of research management in ensuring the relevance, quality and effectiveness of health research programmes and health research projects. The Task Force is expected to make recommendations, among other things, on building and strengthening the research management capability and capacity in countries, and on what to do and how to do so in such capability and capacity strengthening procedures.

For this meeting, the Task Force will help identify key issues and challenges in health research management, and help develop a framework and strategy for capability and capacity building in health research management in the Region.

At the same time, the Task Force will also help review and improve research management training modules, which are tools for strengthening such capability and capacity at the regional and country levels. Actually, most of the time of the Task Force will be spent on review and improvement of the 10 training modules.

Research management is a very broad area, encompassing many issues and challenges. Research management deals with, among other things, research policy and strategy at the global, regional, national, institutional levels, as well as research communication, coordination, networking and partnerships at international and national levels.

Management of Research resources includes funds (distribution among agencies and institutions); budget allocation in countries; investment by governments in health research; management of human resources; development and retention of researchers; research support staff; and, not less important, research managers.

Some of the prominent issues in dealing with research management are:

- Management of research funds within the institutions to ensure their growth and development.
- Management of research findings, and the promotion of collection, maintenance, dissemination and utilization of research results and data.
- Research capability and capacity.
- The ability of managers and researchers to develop and implement research programmes and projects efficiently and effectively.
- Mechanism and process for research project review to ensure relevance and technical and scientific merit.
- Technically sound research methodology.

- Mechanism and process to ensure adequate ethics in research.
- Ethics committee dealing with ethical aspects of research projects and ensuring that researchers are adequately ethical in the pursuance of their research.

These are only some of the issues and challenges in research management. More are to be found in the training modules 1-10, to be reviewed by the Task Force during the course of this meeting.

We have many things to do in strengthening our research management capability and capacity. We do not have the capacity to do everything at the same time. We have to prioritize what we should do first, and what we might do later.

This is the issue with research planning which is an important function of research managers. However, research managers need to have competence in all aspects of research management. They should be able to manage efficiently and effectively the research resources and facilities: financial, human, knowledge and information; and research facilities.

Activities to strengthen research management capability and capacity in countries should be accorded the highest priority. Training activities should be organized in countries, targeting primarily the research managers.

In this connection, it may be a good idea to define who are research managers. This definition, if any, may be just for our own practical operational use and may not be the same as the international standard definition, keeping in mind in the process that not all people working in research are research managers.

To develop a research institute into a full-fledged centre of excellence requires capable research managers. The managers who can efficiently and effectively mobilize, coordinate, and utilize all resources for the steady growth and development of the institution.

The structured training course we are now developing is good. It will be more effective if it is in tandem with on-the-job training, learning by doing and learning from experience.

Research managers are usually mature people; they do not actually need a detailed structured training course. They may rather need orientation in the form of study visits to the institutions in other countries and in other regions. Coaching on the job by experienced persons is very important indeed.

I hope that at the end of the meeting we would have a framework, strategy and tool to move forward to strengthen capability and capacity in health research management in the South-East Asia Region.

Finally, I wish the Task Force all the best and all success in its deliberations, and wish all participants an enjoyable stay in Delhi. Thank you.