

***Introductory Remarks by
Dr Samlee Plianbangchang
Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia***

At

***The Thirty-first Session of
WHO South-East Asia Advisory Committee
on Health Research***

***21-23 July 2009
Kathmandu, Nepal***

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Distinguished ACHR members, distinguished special invitees, ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you all to the Introductory Part of the meeting, before going to its substance. It is like home-coming for health research in the SEA Region. Two years ago, when the thirtieth session of the ACHR was held, our main concern at that time was in the area of emerging infectious diseases. And this is still our important concern today. We would very much have liked to see our regional research capability and capacity in this area adequately strengthened. This is especially true for capability and capacity in “research and development” in “pharmaceuticals” and “biologicals”.

The Region needs to be more self-reliant in the areas of drugs and vaccines for combating emerging infectious diseases. In this connection, we realize that, to succeed in these efforts, building partnerships among all stakeholders was necessary, i.e. partnerships among research institutions, funding agencies, health services provider organizations and the private industry. We were also particularly concerned with the persistent endemicity of AI(H5N1) in the Region. And at that session of ACHR, we specially deliberated upon research aspects of the control of AI(H5N1). This was with the view to finding practical and workable solutions for fighting AI. We were also very concerned with countries' capacity in the management of their research and research-related activities. We paid particular

attention to the management of “research resources” both “human” and “financial”. We underlined the importance of efficient and effective utilization of “available funds”, especially “WHO funds”. These were among other important matters discussed at the thirtieth session of ACHR two years ago.

Particular efforts had been made by the Regional Office during the past two years in taking follow-up actions on conclusions and recommendations derived from that session of the ACHR. During this session, we will review those follow-up actions with special attention to three important areas:

- Avian influenza research;
- research management in countries; and
- promotion of research and development in the areas of drugs and vaccines.

As far as our Regional Research Policy and Strategy are concerned, we have not reviewed them for some time already. We will do it this time. At the same time, we will have the opportunity to learn about the current development in various areas of global health research. We will hear about the global health research activities as well as the recent developments in “tropical disease research” and “research in human reproduction”.

The purpose of such a policy and strategy review is to refine our health research agenda for actions during the next medium-term period in order to finetune our regional research activities with the current global public health challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In order to ensure efficient use of WHO research funds, the management of research in WHO is also very important. As far as the utilization of WHO research funds is concerned, the management of research in WHO and the management of health research in countries are equally important. We should therefore deal with these two areas of research management inclusively. However, for better clarity, at this meeting, we will present the subjects separately.

As far as WHO research funds are concerned, I would like to repeat what I said at the thirtieth ACHR session two years ago. A sizable amount of “WHO resources” was available, at both country and regional levels. That was spent on research. But, the impact of utilization of such resources on research had not been really palpable. Had a systematic study on this issue been undertaken, we would have been surprised by the sizeable amount of wastage occurring in the utilization of WHO funds.

I would again like to underline that efficient management of research and research-related activities is extremely important. It is important to help ensure rational and optimal utilization of research resources. Such management can help ensure positive achievements of our research activities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Some time ago this year, the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia organized a regional meeting on research priorities in communicable diseases. We will present the

outcome of that meeting for review and discussions by the ACHR. This is with the view to developing a strategic roadmap for implementation of the recommendations arising from that meeting.

On Communicable Diseases, I would like to remind ourselves of the research needs for addressing the current public health concerns, such as the influenza pandemic H1N1 2009, and the outbreaks of dengue and chikungunya. Also, we are yet to pursue research to find solutions for effective interventions against the endemic AI(H5N1). Also, during this session, the ACHR will deliberate upon the research priorities in non-communicable diseases.

In the case of both communicable and noncommunicable diseases, I would like that we pay special attention to epidemiological and operational research—research that can help ensure effective interventions through evidence-based programme development and management. This aspect of research includes, among others, appropriate application of available technology in disease prevention and control. This is much more needed in the areas of health services and health systems research.

In disease prevention and control, we need greater research that can help promote “primary prevention”: research that backs up community-based public health interventions. These are interventions that take into account the related risks and determinants. Certainly, we need health systems research to support the implementation of the primary health care approach in the community. Certainly, “basic and clinical research” are also very important. And WHO will support these research efforts, whenever there are needs. And whenever there is a funding opportunity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The ACHR is an advisory body to WHO on research policies and strategies, in particular. Our deliberations on various subjects of the agenda may need to focus on policy and strategy issues. We need help from the ACHR in developing regional research policies and strategies for various specific areas. And we need help from the ACHR in developing roadmaps for the implementation of such policies and strategies.

Our own experiences from professional practices are very important as the basis for the development of such policies, strategies, and roadmaps. It will help ensure that the ground realities in our countries are clearly reflected in our research work.

At this meeting, we will also touch on the idea of “research for health”. “Research for Health” implies multidimensional research that has a bearing on health. It implies research efforts of various disciplines and sectors that are required for improvement of the health of all people. “Research for health” expands the horizon of research needs for health development. The idea of “research for health” fits very well with today’s health concept, the concept that extends the scope of health far beyond the medical arena.

Very importantly, “research for health” must also be designed to support our efforts towards equitable distribution of health resources and to help facilitate the closing of the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in health. The evidence from “research for health” will help us better in our attempt to “reach the unreached”: the poor, marginalized, vulnerable and the underprivileged.

Distinguished participants,

The policies, strategies and roadmaps developed at this meeting will be operationalized through “timebound actionplans”. These plans will be developed after this meeting through joint efforts of the Member States and WHO.

Once again, I thank all participants for their attention to, and for their interest in health research in the SEA Region. I look forward to your productive deliberations, and to the fruitful outcome of the meeting.

And once again I wish you an enjoyable stay in Kathmandu.

Thank you.