

## BOOK REVIEWS

### HEALTH OF MANKIND

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The hundredth international symposium held by the Ciba Foundation took place in March 1967, and to mark the occasion the topic chosen was the health of mankind. As in former symposia, the names of the 28 participants invited showed the policy of the foundation to emphasize interdisciplinary contacts as well as international cooperation. Another policy of the Foundation was also illustrated in the text of the papers and in the discussions following them, where the views expressed were those of individuals and not of organizations or governments.

The main topic, the health of mankind, was divided into three sections:

1. Assessment of the health of mankind, containing six papers.
2. Major factors aggravating world health problems—five papers.
3. Manpower and education—three papers.

The text of each paper in the volume is followed by a summary of the main points, a recorded discussion among the participants and, for each paper, a list of references varying from less than half a page to four pages.

The undoubted authority of the participants made all the contributions of lasting value. Many of the most telling points emerged also in the discussions, where the free exchange of controversial views was stimulating and thought provoking.

In the first paper, on the world incidence and prevalence of the major communicable diseases, the speaker paid tribute to the work of the World Health Organization in making a good start on the project of controlling and reducing these diseases in the entire world. Such a comprehensive review, brought up to date from time to time, should be a useful starting point for students of epidemiology, so that they might get a world perspective before concentrating on particular areas or diseases. In the discussion that followed one speaker summarized several points made by others when he said, "The ultimate prevention of all the communicable diseases you mentioned is subject to the whole gamut of sociological, economic and physical adjustments."

It always seems insidious for any one reviewer to select, from among a collection of distinguished papers such as this volume contains, a few main themes. The points that follow may show the bias of this reviewer, but they also emphasize certain currents of thought running through the symposium, which are reiterated in much of the current literature in this field.

The yawning gap between the needs and the facilities to meet them, of the developing countries and of those called developed countries, was obvious in many of the presentations in all three sections. It emerged very clearly in the papers and discussions on maternal and child health and on nutrition—the latter topic having far the longest and most vigorous discussion of all the papers presented. The nutrition paper was organized under two headings: undernutrition caused by failure in the total food supply; and malnutrition caused by lack of variety in food. The speaker at the end of his paper emphasized what he called "a baffling paradox:" that health improvement and population increase is as aggravating a factor in tackling the world's food problems as is food shortage and lack of variety an aggravating factor in health improvement.

Inherent in this theme, and emerging in several other papers, was the problem of personnel to carry out existing services and promote the new ones needed. In the third section the paper on world resources in trained manpower focussed attention on the vast potentialities of medical knowledge and of current research, and asked

the leading question: who can carry out these programs? Again, active discussion centered on the importance of research in manpower problems, on the potential contribution of auxiliary medical personnel and on the need to organize new forms of health service administration in which all medical workers could be part of a team.

The emphasis on new types of medical and health personnel led to a full discussion following the paper on education and training facilities, and many references were made to the subject in earlier discussions. One contributor made a categorical statement that the lack of capable teachers was the strongest limiting factor affecting the availability of medical services. This inevitably provoked discussion on the balance of teaching and research in medical schools. Several participants spoke of the prestige attached to research, and stressed the prospects of promotion in this field, compared with the status and opportunities reflected in teaching students.

The paper on "the inhuman city" followed the one on the pollution of water, air and food. The theory of Ekistics—the science of human settlement—was an attempt to bring light and common sense into man's apparent refusal to control his own man-made environment. It was a salutary reminder that scientific knowledge and wealth do not of themselves bring tolerable conditions of living for modern man and his family.

The final paper set forth an outline for a World Health Service to meet the present needs of mankind. In the discussion following some support was voiced for the idea as was a good deal of vigorous questioning. Nevertheless, the point was well taken and expressed in the words of the Director General of W.H.O. when reviewing the idea: "It seems we have a blockage and this blockage is tradition. We are trying to do things in the way we did before, forgetting that medicine is an evolutionary science."

Most books presenting the results of a symposium raise certain questions about their subsequent use. Undoubtedly they have a place in the library of any medical school, health training institution and society or foundation concerned with health services and problems. Particular sections of a volume such as this one can be recommended reading for students, and the references cited may spur students to

further reading on a subject. Perhaps the most lasting value of a collection of papers and discussions such as the one under review lies in the discovery by students that well-known world authorities can have conflicting, or at least divergent, views on problem situations and their possible solution. The open minded attitude that weighs possibilities and considers alternatives in situations in the field of health and disease, affecting the lives and livelihood of individuals and societies—this is basic in a scientific approach to the health of mankind.

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