

ORGANISATION OF MEDICAL RESEARCH IN INDIA UNDER THE INDIAN RESEARCH FUND ASSOCIATION.

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In the early years of the present century facilities for systematic investigation of problems of tropical and other diseases were first provided in India. This commenced with the establishment of laboratories in different parts of India, the intention being to provide a central laboratory and to encourage the formation of laboratories in the major provinces wherever they could suitably be situated.

The establishment of Pasteur treatment in India necessitated the provision of laboratories for the purpose and this fitted in with general requirements. Over a period of years the laboratories established were the Central Research Institute, Kasauli, under the Government of India, the Bombay Bacteriological Laboratory (now the Haffkine Institute) at Parel, the King Institute at Guindy for the Madras Presidency and the Pasteur Institutes at Kasauli, Coonoor, Shillong and Rangoon. The Pasteur Institutes in most cases also did general laboratory work.

The staffs of these Institutes were able to undertake a certain amount of research work in addition to their routine duties and the laboratories could provide facilities for attached workers to carry out research on special subjects.

A few workers were deputed from time to time to carry out such special enquiries but the number available who had suitable training for research work was small. It was realised that, with the very large field which existed in India for research in tropical diseases, more trained workers were required and to meet this need the Government of India created a Medical Research Department in which was included the existing staffs of the major laboratories and Pasteur Institutes, along with an additional number of officers, specially selected, who would be available for whole time research work either as attached to laboratories or conducting investigations in the field.

Provision had to be made for the pay of the additional officers and for the expenses of their investigations, including the cost of assistants and employees of all grades, and the cost of equipment, etc., and also for financing investigations carried out by other agencies. For this purpose the Government of India constituted the Indian Research Fund Association in 1911 as a local fund administered by Government. An annual grant of Rs.5 lakhs was given to meet the cost of the research work along with a sum sufficient to meet the pay of the officers of the Medical Research Department not filling the specified appointments of Directors or Assistant Directors of the laboratories.

Under the Articles of Association the affairs of the I.R.F.A. are managed by a Governing Body of which the Hon'ble Member in charge of the Department of Education, Health and Lands is Chairman. The representation on the Governing Body is both official and non-official. The members include the Secretary, E.H. & L., the Director-General, Indian Medical Service, representatives elected by the Council of State, the Legislative Assembly and the Medical Faculties of Universities and the Indian Science Congress Association. The Directors of three major laboratories are also included and the Public Health Commissioner with the Government of India is the Secretary. The duties of the Governing Body are essentially administrative and it has full control of the finances of the Association.

The Governing Body appoints a Scientific Advisory Board to advise them on technical matters relating to research and in particular on the allocation of funds to specific investigations. The Director-General, Indian Medical Service, is President and the Public Health Commissioner Secretary. The other members are Directors of the larger Institutes who have had prolonged experience of medical research in India and three elected members of high standing in the medical profession.

Applications for grants towards the cost of specific research projects may be made to the Secretary, I.R.F.A., by any person who has suitable experience and facilities. These are considered at an annual meeting of the Scientific Advisory Board which also reviews the work of the previous year carried out under grants from the association. To help them in this work the Scientific Advisory Board appoints special Advisory Committees to deal with each subject of major importance on which research is being carried out at the time. Committees have, for example, been formed for Malaria, Nutrition, Plague, Cholera, Tuberculosis, etc.

After a detailed consideration of the proposals the Scientific Advisory Board submits recommendations for a programme of research for the following year to the Governing Body taking into account the funds available. On final approval by the Governing Body the funds are allotted.

In addition to annual grants for specific enquiries, which may be renewed from year to year if approved, the Association finances certain research organisations of a semi-permanent nature. In this category are the Nutrition Research Laboratories, Coonoor, and the research side of the Malaria Institute of India.

To expand further the opportunities for experience in medical research the Association tentatively formed a cadre of Junior Research Workers and is now giving fellowships for the purpose of bringing new workers into the research field.

The Association maintains a library and stores and maintains and publishes the Indian Journal of Medical Research, the Indian medical research memoirs, and the Journal of the Malaria Institute of India in which are published the results of research work carried out under the I.R.F.A. and much of the important medical research carried out independently in India. The cost of research work carried out under the Association is almost entirely borne by the Government of India, only small contributions being made occasionally by Local Governments towards the cost of enquiries which may be of special importance to their provinces.

The Parlakimedi trust fund for scholarships in nutrition research is administered by the Governing Body of the Association.

The administrative costs of the Association are kept at a low level, as much of the work is carried out by officers whose pay is met from other sources.

The constitution of the I.R.F.A. allows a considerable latitude in regard to the lines of work which may be financed, and, in practice, there is a continuous evolution in the programme of research undertaken in accordance with the relative importance which particular problems may be considered to have from time to time. There is a degree of elasticity in the methods of administration which permits of urgent problems being taken up at once and the individual research worker is given a wide measure of independence in the selection of his subject and in the conduct of his investigations.

The Future.

This organisation of medical research under the I.R.F.A. presents many advantages. The Governing Body is constituted so as to provide representation of wide interests both official and non-official, medical and non-medical, scientific and administrative. The composition of the Scientific Advisory Board can be altered in any way by the Governing Body if considered necessary to meet changing requirements.

Although the question of the formation of a Department of Medical Sciences under a National Research Council is one which deserves consideration it is doubtful whether such a department, as part of a wider organisation, would be as effective in relation to medical research as a body specifically interested in the one special subject.

A Scientific Advisory Board with its special Advisory Committees would still be required as at present and a permanent Secretariat for the department would be necessary. Administrative costs would probably be higher than under the present system. The influence of the present Governing Body of the I.R.F.A. would probably be lost if control was taken over by a National Council dealing with all subjects. There are numerous administrative points to be taken into consideration on which difficulties might arise

including questions such as the relationships with Government Laboratories, services of officers of the medical research department and of the Junior Cadre of research workers, administration of stores and library, editing of the Journals, etc. It should be noted that in the United Kingdom medical research is carried out by a separate organisation, the Medical Research Council, which is under a special Committee of the Privy Council.