

Editorial: The role of the Federation of European Societies for Tropical Medicine and International Health

On the occasion of the First European Conference on Tropical Medicine in Hamburg on 22 October 1995, the Federation of European Societies for Tropical Medicine and International Health was founded. The establishment of a European body embracing professional societies interested in tropical medicine was overdue. National societies for tropical medicine have a long history reaching back into the last century – their development was intimately entwined with the European colonial venture and thus with nationalism. Since the access of most tropical countries to political independence, so-called ‘tropical medicine’ has undergone an in-depth evolution towards north-south partnership, a more global approach to the perceived needs in the communities at risk, and consequently towards better attention to the cultural differences among partners (De Bruycker & Hagan 1996; Van der Stuyft 1996; Temmerman 1997). Tropical medicine today is, however, one of the few health specialities that are not only very intersectorial and interdisciplinary but also have an international outlook with the emphasis on the tropics and their specific bioclimatic conditions and effect on the developing countries, and on people living in poverty.

To build upon their expertise and to back up the need for increasing international collaboration, national societies in Europe have joined into a Federation. The question may be asked whether Europe is an inappropriate limitation for an internationally relevant issue such as tropical medicine. The understanding of the Federation is indeed that Europe joins its know-how to reach out especially to developing countries, with special attention to colleagues and institutions. The Federation wants to contribute to the advancement of Tropical Medicine and International Health. It will foster the formation of new scientific societies dealing with health sciences in the tropics. It will favour research networks particularly with institutions in developing countries, building upon existing research endeavours. In addition, the Federation will encourage the exchange and the dissemination of information

about opportunities for education, training and research in tropical medicine. Within Europe, training in tropical medicine will be harmonised as far as possible. Linkages and support will be sought particularly with the European Union.

It is planned to promote regular scientific conferences on Tropical Medicine and International Health in Europe every three years with strong participation from the South. The second conference will be held on the occasion of the Centenary of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine on October 14 to 18, 1998. Others will follow in Antwerp and Marseilles. Meanwhile, national societies will maintain their role in promoting tropical medicine at the national level.

The Federation plans to harmonize health strategies and recommendations related to developing countries, international travellers and emergency situations with particular regard to refugees. It will seek the advice of practitioners, scientists and health workers from developing countries on the identification of priorities for the promotion of health and research in their regions.

The Federation is constituted by the member societies who nominate their delegate to the council of the Federation. The council in turn elects a board for a 2-year period. The Federation will also seek close collaboration with the editorial board of *Tropical Medicine and International Health* and has established an association with the European Schools of Tropical Medicine (TROPMED EUROPE).

Recently, the role of Tropical Medicine has been questioned in several journals as an outdated relic of the past. On the contrary, the members of the Federation are convinced that Tropical Medicine in the context of International Health and in view of its interdisciplinary nature has an up-to-date and growing role to play in promoting global health in the respect of regional specificities.

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