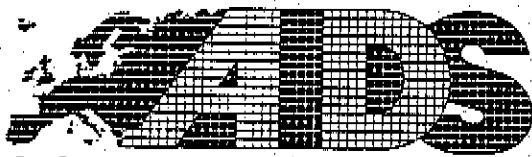




WHO

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE



GLOBAL PROGRAMME ON AIDS

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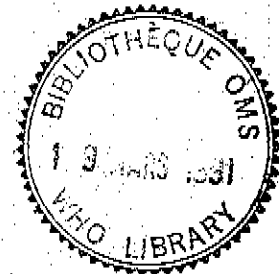
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THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN AIDS PREVENTION AND CONTROL



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EUR/HFA TARGET 4

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This document presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Workshop on the Role of the Media in AIDS Prevention and Control held in Oslo from 10 to 13 February 1990. It was convened by the Regional Office for Europe to promote work aimed at achieving the following target in the health for all strategy.^a

TARGET 4

REDUCING DISEASE AND DISABILITY

By the year 2000, the average number of years that people live free from major disease and disability should be increased by at least 10%.

Index terms

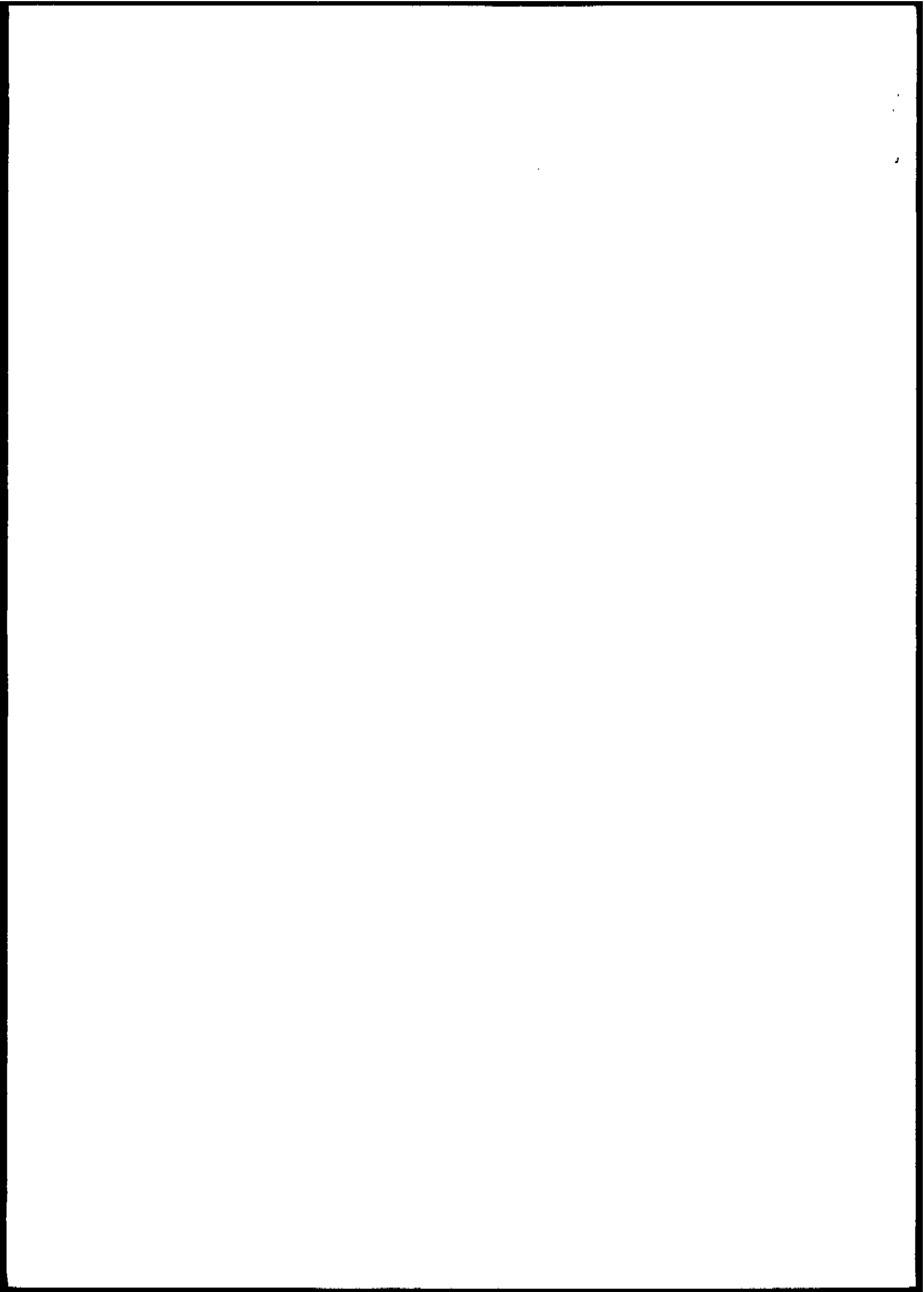
ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME - prevent/control
MASS MEDIA

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^a *Targets for health for all.* Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office Europe, 1985 (European Health for All Series No. 1).

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Introduction

Dr Nakajima, in a speech to the Executive Board of the World Health Organization on 22 January 1990, said it was unfortunate that the misleading presentation of information on AIDS in the media had led to some confusion, since the media could prove a key element in transmitting correct messages associated with the activities of WHO and Member States, especially on primary prevention.

Dr Jonathan Mann, Director of the Global Programme on AIDS, said, in a statement to the United States National AIDS meeting in Washington on 2 December 1989:

Despite these efforts, at the end of the 1980s, the world's vulnerability to AIDS remains and is increasing. Overall, the global epidemic is gaining momentum, major barriers to more effective action still exist, and complacency about AIDS is spreading. The world is being lulled into complacency which threatens to undermine existing progress and cripple future efforts. Denial of the realities of this pandemic, at the personal, national and international level, has been and remains today a grave danger to the world's health.

We have arrived at a critical juncture in the global fight against AIDS. The gap between the pace of the epidemic and prevention and control efforts is threatening to widen. We are racing for control of an epidemic as fatal as any the world has ever known.

The two statements, taken together, provided the *raison d'être* for the bringing-together of seventeen people drawn from the two professions of health and journalism.

The scope and purpose of the workshop was "to promote a better understanding and working relationship between the two professions of journalism and health and thereby increase the quality of media coverage; the aim of better coverage being to develop and maintain public awareness and to influence attitudes and behaviour".

All aspects of journalism/media were represented: newsprint (divided into daily press, medical press and magazines), and radio and television. A balance was also achieved between female and male, and between eastern and western Europe. A few individuals could be regarded as link people between the two professions, being either physicians working as journalists or journalists working in health. A tremendously valuable contribution was made by an HIV-positive journalist.

Highlights from the discussions

The discussion, as might be anticipated from such independent people, was remarkably frank and open, but with both professions being totally sincere in their wish to achieve a better, mutually more profitable relationship. Everyone saw it as being in both their own professional interest and in the interest of a public threatened by a potentially devastating epidemic, to make only positive, realistic statements.

After the different viewpoints had been put across in informal presentations by eight participants, and points of clarification made, the Workshop divided into two discussion groups. The subsequent discussion took place around the following framework.

1. What action can be taken at (a) national level and (b) international level to promote better working relationships between the media and health?
2. How can the media help in dealing with the problems of:
 - (a) the fair treatment of the ethical issue of AIDS and HIV
 - (b) public complacency?
3. Are there optimum formats for the main points of contact between journalists and health professionals, i.e.:
 - (a) press releases/statements
 - (b) press conferences/briefings
 - (c) press information offices/help lines
 - (d) workshops?
4. Do both professions need educating?
 - (a) Is there a need for national/international leaflets/booklets aimed at both journalists and health professions? If so, what should the content be?
 - (b) Can the media help professionals with training, e.g. press, radio, TV interviews, techniques, fellowships?
5. Is it possible to evaluate this type of work?
6. Is it possible/desirable to pass on the lessons of the last few years to the newly emerging eastern European press?
7. Has any of this any part in the training curricula of journalists/health professionals?
8. What is the role of the media on World AIDS Day?

Recommendations

The participants were unanimous that a good working relationship, based on mutual respect, between the two professions of health and journalism was essential if the full potential of the media to assist in the prevention and management of AIDS was to be realized.

All health problems and issues benefit from such a relationship, but in the area of AIDS it is absolutely critical given the unique features of the pandemic (no vaccine and no cure, and fear, ignorance and complacency acting as barriers to effective prevention and control). The only way to limit the spread of the epidemic is for the general public to change its lifestyle. Thus, they need to be kept constantly informed in an accurate, objective way; they must not be led astray, confused, frightened or lulled into a false sense of complacency by sensationalism, inaccuracy or neglect by the media. In short, health professionals need the media as a bridge to the community.

Recommendations to Member States

1. In order to improve the relationship between the two professions, national AIDS committees should take immediate steps to establish a mechanism that will make possible a continuous two-way flow of information and innovative ideas.
2. National AIDS committees should ensure that they fully utilize all the opportunities offered by the various media to reach specific target audiences in the community.
3. Workshops should be held on a regular basis to provide a forum for educating (a) representatives of newspapers, magazines, radio and television concerning the epidemiology of AIDS, and (b) selected health professionals on the different working methods of the various media.
4. The provision of fellowships would permit health professionals to work for a period of time in the media, and for media staff to work within a health institution thus promoting better mutual understanding.
5. Seriously consider the production and distribution of a guidebook to AIDS containing: a glossary of AIDS-related terminology for the benefit of journalists; a glossary of media-related terms for the benefit of health professionals; the contact telephone, fax and telex numbers and addresses for hot-line or help-line reference points for journalists requiring information; the names and similar contact information of journalists for health professionals wishing to reach them; and authoritative sources of information on all matters related to AIDS. (Some information might be common to all Member States, and so international collaboration over its production should also be considered.)
6. The adoption by the national AIDS committees and health institutions of formats and mechanisms for disseminating information that is already familiar to journalists. For example: press releases that are phrased in media terms rather than cautious health-related jargon; press conferences that are genuine question-and-answer sessions, not medical lectures; the use of embargoes and briefings; personally addressed communications that reach the desk of the journalist before the news has become obsolete.
7. To make full use of the unique intermediary position occupied by the editors of medical journals.
8. Every opportunity should be taken to utilize HIV-positive or AIDS patients who have voluntarily demonstrated media skills. Such people have the experience of knowing what it is like to be at the receiving end of ostracism, stigmatization and rejection, and they can be very persuasive voices to which the public will listen.

Recommendations to WHO

9. Provide assistance to Member States in the form of resources and expertise to facilitate (a) the holding of workshops and (b) the production of guidelines to AIDS.
10. Adopt modern practices and procedures in its own relationships with the media, so that at all times journalists have a fast, accurate, easy, accessible and authoritative source of information.

11. Facilitate the development in eastern Europe, as new press structures arise, of press relationship strategies that avoid the development of public complacency based on oversaturation of information and of mistrust between health professionals and journalists.

Annex 1

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