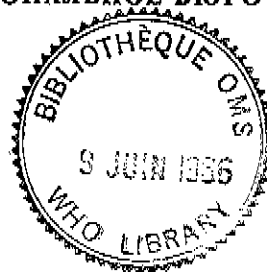




ВСЕМИРНАЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ ЗДРАВООХРАНЕНИЯ
ЕВРОПЕЙСКОЕ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЕ БЮРО

Planning Meeting for the EURO Programme on
Economic Aspects of Communicable Diseases

Copenhagen, 12-14 March 1975



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REPORT

Introduction

Health resources in all countries of the world are limited in relation to the need for the prevention and control of disease and the growing demand for care. This calls for more economical use of facilities, staff and funds. At the same time the burden of some communicable diseases on the economy is becoming increasingly important. Evaluation of the economic impact of various diseases as well as cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analyses should aid in the rational use of available resources in health programmes, and should facilitate the selection of more effective and less costly preventive and control measures. Due account has, of course, to be taken of difficulties in applying economic concepts to health. Reliable data are often lacking; there are many hidden costs and intangible benefits, and subjective values are often involved.

Communicable diseases have been intensively studied and their natural history is relatively well understood. Many of them are amenable to control. In regard to some of them, there are alternative technologies and measures for their prevention and control. To this extent they constitute a suitable subject for economic appraisal. While a number of individual studies have already been made in member countries, there remains a need for a more systematic effort. A programme for future action is therefore proposed.

The Regional Office for Europe convened a Planning Meeting for the EURO Programme on Economic Aspects of Communicable Diseases from 12 to 14 March 1975. Participants included temporary advisers and members of WHO staff representing various disciplines involved, e.g., epidemiologists, economists, statisticians and public health administrators (see Annex II).

The group reviewed the problem and proposes the following outline of a programme regarding economic aspects of communicable diseases to the Regional Director for his consideration.

Proposed objectives of the programme:

1. to develop and elaborate methods and techniques for studying the economic aspects of communicable diseases;
2. to promote a better understanding of the economic aspects of communicable diseases, in order to improve the planning and management of prevention and control; and
3. to encourage collaboration in Member States and at international level between public health administrators, epidemiologists and other relevant disciplines on the one hand, and economists on the other.

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Proposed line of approach

It is proposed that the above objectives be achieved by:

1. collecting publications and other relevant information and disseminating it to health administrations of Member States and to interested institutions and individuals;
2. stimulating, assisting and co-ordinating studies and applied research on communicable diseases in countries of the Region, their economic impact on the community, the costs of treating them and their sequelae, and on the cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness aspects of their prevention and control;
3. examining the results of national and international studies and evaluating the methods and procedures used for the investigation of the economic aspects of communicable diseases and their prevention and control;
4. promoting training of national staff needed for the development of activities in this field.

Proposed criteria for selection of subjects for study and methods of analysis

1. The study of the economic aspects of communicable diseases is often constrained by lack of information and by lack of knowledge of some essential factors. It seems more promising to study first those diseases for which we have more complete knowledge with respect to their incidence, etiology, natural history and control. Nevertheless, there is no disease or group of diseases that is not amenable to some type of economic evaluation. In view of the importance of certain groups of diseases such as respiratory infections, intestinal infections and intra-hospital infections, it is considered that research into their economic aspects should be encouraged, in spite of the fact that their natural history and other characteristics are not yet fully understood.
2. The criteria for selection of diseases for study may be classified as follows:
 - (1) the social importance of the disease,
 - (2) the biological basis for effective intervention,
 - (3) the feasibility of intervention with respect to social attitudes and the availability of resources.

These criteria may be presented schematically, as in the table overleaf.

A thorough review of methods was not possible in the time available, but it was apparent that a variety of different approaches may exist. Depending on the specific issue at hand, various methods can be applied to the analysis of the relevant economic aspects of communicable diseases of public health importance and their prevention and control. Three examples are given below for purposes of illustration:

Example 1: The issue is to select the optimal measure or combination of measures to prevent or control a certain disease or group of diseases. The cost-effectiveness method can be applied where the natural history, epidemiology and prevention and control measures are well established (e.g., in the case of tuberculosis and tetanus), in order to arrive at a control strategy which is both effective and economically sound.

Example 2: The issue is to mobilize resources of sectors other than health for action to prevent and control a certain disease or group of diseases. Cost-benefit or possibly cost-effectiveness analysis can usefully be applied where the natural history and epidemiology are well known but where control action or resources for such action also depend on other sectors (e.g., in the case of the group of intestinal infections, or animal diseases communicable to man).

Table 1 CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES FOR STUDY OF ECONOMIC ASPECTS

1 Social importance	2 Basis for effective intervention	3 Feasibility in view of availability of resources and attitudes of population
<u>Health aspects</u> - Morbidity - Mortality - Fatality - Disability - Dependency <u>Cost of</u> - treatment - rehabilitation - prevention <u>Economic consequences on</u> - trade, - tourism, etc.	<u>Knowledge of natural history of disease</u> <u>Availability of</u> - diagnostic techniques - effective treatment - effective control measures - epidemiological models - indices of effectiveness of intervention	<u>Availability of resources for:</u> - diagnosis - treatment - control <u>Attitude of population to intervention and willingness to co-operate</u>

Example 3: The issue is to establish a rationale for a research programme directed towards the study of epidemiology and control of a certain disease or group of diseases. Cost-accounting methods can be used to estimate the economic burden where the natural history, epidemiology and prevention and control measures are not well established but where the disease appears to put a considerable economic burden on the health services or the general economy (e.g., in the case of intra-hospital infections or influenza).

Some applications of these various methods may require the use of special techniques, such as systems analysis, econometrics, input-output analysis, modelling and mathematical programming.

Recommendations

The following sequence of action is recommended:

1. to collect information on studies and investigations of the economic aspects of communicable diseases which have already been carried out, are now going on or are projected;
2. to inform Member States of the programme proposed by the Regional Office relating to the economic aspects of communicable diseases and to take the initiative in promoting studies in member countries;

3. to explore the existing possibilities within WHO and other organizations for studying the economic aspects of communicable diseases with particular reference to the availability of resources for such study;
4. to review and evaluate the studies undertaken, with particular emphasis on the methods and techniques used and their consistency and practical applicability;
5. to provide for the continuing exchange of views on and experience of the various approaches and concepts used in these studies and to disseminate information on methods and techniques which have been found suitable and reliable in practice.
6. to promote training of national staff in this field.

The group also considered specific inter-country activities proposed for inclusion in the programme and budget of the European Region of WHO, and supported them with certain amendments (see Annex I).

PROPOSED INTER-COUNTRY PROGRAMME

(a) Study of the Economic Aspects of Communicable Diseases

To collect and examine the results of studies carried out in Member States on the epidemiological parameters of communicable diseases of public health interest, on the costs of the treating of these diseases and their sequelae, and on the cost-effectiveness and benefits of their prevention. To stimulate and promote specific studies in this field.

(b) Working Group on the Economic Aspects of Communicable Diseases

To analyse the results of the studies carried out and to examine the suitability and reliability of the methods used in order to determine which types of control programme for these diseases are most rational.

(c) Symposium on the Economic Aspects of Communicable Diseases

To review the methods and results of the studies of the economic aspects of communicable diseases and their prevention, in order to inform the countries of the Region of the procedures found satisfactory. To review existing policies having regard to the economic aspects of communicable disease prevention and to recommend future action including necessary training in this field of work for national staff.

ANNEX II

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