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WOMEN'S HEALTH INSTITUTIONS

Report on a WHO Meeting

Vienna, Austria
22-23 September 1995

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TARGET 8

HEALTH OF WOMEN

By the year 2000, there should be sustained and continuing improvement in the health of all women.

ABSTRACT

The first European Meeting on Women's Health Institutions brought together 150 participants from all over Europe to follow up the recommendations made by the 1994 WHO conference on women's health. The participants addressed issues of appropriate care for women, global changes and emergent trends in women's health, the promotion of women's health in Europe and the priorities, tasks and objectives of women's health centres. The discussions also covered aspects of management, including the financing, human resources and management of health centres, as well as press work and public relations. Case studies from Austria, Germany and the Netherlands clearly showed the important role of nongovernmental organizations in the provision of health services to women in western Europe. The participants concluded that the Forum of Women's Health Institutions was established to exchange experience and examples of good practice, and, while noting the diversity of women's health institutions, nevertheless identified nine common criteria and eight common objectives for them.

Keywords

WOMEN'S HEALTH
HEALTH SERVICES – organization and administration
EUROPE

Introduction

The First European Meeting on Women's Health Institutions brought together 150 participants from all over Europe in Vienna from 22-23 September 1995. The purpose of the Meeting was to follow up the recommendations made by the Women's Health Counts conference in February 1994.

In preparation for this Meeting, European institutions and organizations concerned with women's health were interviewed through a questionnaire. The resulting manual was presented at the Meeting. The lectures and working groups during the Meeting addressed issues of appropriate care for women, global changes and emergent trends in women's health, women's health promotion in Europe, examples of women's health centres, promotion of women's health at the workplace, and priorities, tasks and objectives of women's health centres.

The discussions also covered aspects of management, including financing, human resources and management of health centres, as well as press work and public relations. Presentations also covered case studies from Austria, Germany and the Netherlands, which clearly showed the important role that nongovernmental organizations play in the provision of health services to women in western Europe today.

Conclusions and recommendations

A comparison of experience in various Member States enabled participants to note that women's health institutions shared a basic common identity, notwithstanding the diversity in type and nature of service provision, and to identify the following criteria for them. Women's health institutions should:

- address a wide variety of topics and services
- emphasize the prevention of diseases
- provide screening services
- be based on a feminist concept of women's health
- provide differentiated and individual offers conforming to women's needs
- be run by multiprofessional teams
- be easily accessible
- document and evaluate their work
- usually include outreach activities to target otherwise underserved women.

Women's health institutions should aim to include the following objectives in their areas of responsibility:

- health promotion in maternity
- sexual health; preventing unwanted pregnancy, miscarriages, sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS and unwanted abortions
- promotion of healthy lifestyles, prevention of cancer and smoking
- developing strategies to reduce violence against women
- offering gynaecological prevention services with respect to breast cancer prevention
- prevention of "overmedicalization" of women's health
- prevention of drug abuse and drug dependence
- providing special services for women from ethnic minorities.

The Meeting recommended that women's health institutions should continue to pursue the following goals:

- the establishment of women's rights within the traditional medical system;
- the right to informed consent;
- the development of ethical standards for medical services and quality control; and
- increased cooperation with, but not necessarily integration into, the traditional medical system.

The discussion as to the necessary next steps reflected the diverse backgrounds and experience of the participants, some of whom came from more traditional medical institutions, while others came from institutions born out of a feminist tradition. The Meeting concluded with the recommendation that a forum of women's health institutions should be established to encourage discussion and the exchange of experience and examples of good practice. However, while recommendations regarding good practice should be made on a broad basis, participants were concerned that the diversity in the character of women's health institutions should be preserved and that recommendations should never take on a prescriptive character.

Annex 1

WORKING PAPERS

- *Women's health institutions in Europe*, compiled by the Ludwig Boltzman Institute for Health Psychology of Women in cooperation with WHO.¹
- Abstracts of the following speeches:
 - Opening speech by Federal Minister Dr Christa Krammer
 - Opening speech by Dr Ludwig Casper, Association of Hospitals and Nursing Institutions of the city of Vienna.
- *Global changes and emergent trends in women's health*. Dr Assia Brandrup-Lukanow, WHO Regional Office for Europe.
- *Women's health promotion in Europe: from idea to implementation*. Professor Beate Wimmer-Puchinger, Ludwig Boltzman Institute for Health Psychology of Women.
- *Successful examples and prototypes of women's health promotion in Europe. Examples from the Netherlands*. Dr Evelyn de Leeuw, Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region.
- *Successful examples and prototypes of women's health promotion in Europe. Examples from Germany*. Anneliese Hendel-Kramer, Albert Ludwig University, Freiburg, Germany.
- *Successful examples and prototypes of women's health promotion in Europe. Examples from Sweden*. Dr Bam Björling, Foundation of Women's Forum, Stockholm, Sweden.
- *Aspects of management: financing, resources and management of women's health centres*. Dr Bam Björling, Foundation of Women's Forum, Stockholm, Sweden.
- *Priority tasks and objectives of women's health centres*. Liesbeth van der Jagt et al, National Centre for Women's Health Care, Utrecht, Netherlands.
- *Implementation of women's health centres in existing health care systems*. Dr Evelyn de Leeuw, Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region.
- *Networking of women's health centres in existing health care systems*. Professor Beate Wimmer-Puchinger, Ludwig Boltzman Institute for Health Psychology of Women.
- *Health promotion at the workplace. Women's health centres as catalysts*. Dr Irene Kloimüller, Institute of Occupational Health Promotion, Vienna, Austria.
- *Press work and public relations for women's health centres*. Ulrike Süß-Lindert, WHO Healthy Cities Project, Vienna, Austria.

¹ Copies of this document and of the abstracts of the speeches can be obtained from the Sexual and Family Health unit in the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Annex 2

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