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Working Group on the Organization and
Methodology of Endocrinology Laboratories

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THE ENDOCRINOLOGY LABORATORY AS A SERVICE
(a) STANDING ON ITS OWN

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There are three different types of stand-alone laboratories providing endocrinology services.

- (i) laboratories specifically attached to specialized endocrinology departments in hospitals and health centres;
- (ii) laboratories which initially were part of a general laboratory service and, owing to the rapid growth of the subject and its specialized needs for staff and equipment, have in some cases become autonomous;
- (iii) laboratories set up with central funding to carry out research and to provide a service in endocrinology for associated hospitals.

It is rare for any of the laboratories to provide the whole range of endocrine investigations: most are superspecialized into one or more endocrine or methodological fields through their own staff interests or the major clinical interest in the hospital departments they serve. None of the laboratories are self-sufficient: they obtain many reagents and trained staff from other sources.

Until recently, a high proportion of service assays for endocrinology were carried out in stand-alone laboratories, since other laboratories lacked the skilled staff and equipment needed. The rapid rise in clinical demand has created problems, which can be considered under two headings:

1. Methodology

- (a) In general the methods used require considerable skill, tend to be cumbersome and there is frequently a lack of adequate standardization and of quality control.
- (b) There are frequent difficulties in obtaining good quality reagents.
- (c) Laboratories tend to be technique-dependent, and it is difficult for them to change a method, e.g. from radioimmunoassay to an alternative technique.
- (d) Through the rapid expansion of the service and the widespread introduction of radioimmunoassay, many laboratories are housed in premises which are at present inadequate.

2. Organization

- (a) The laboratories employ highly skilled staff, who:

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- (i) have poor career prospects (expect in academic institutions) owing to their extreme specialization;
 - (ii) regard research publications as more important than service needs;
 - (iii) lack experience in the logistics and needs of service departments.
- (b) There is a lack of communication between specialized laboratories except through research papers and personal contacts. Service needs tend to be overlooked.