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OBSERVATION ON THE PROVISIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL
SANITARY REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO CHOLERA

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The provisions pertaining to cholera in the International Sanitary Regulations are contained in Articles 60-69. Since the infection spread and affect many countries in the Western Pacific and South-east Asia regions in 1961 and even up to the present, it has been noted that many countries have instituted measures in excess of the provisions of these articles. Some of these were imposed with public health reasoning and some did not have such reasons to justify its imposition. In spite of these excessive measures, however, the spread of cholera continued and it might be concluded that the provisions contained in Articles 60-69 are not adequate enough to stem this infection. It is felt that a re-examination of these regulations are necessary in order to make it more effective, and if possible, less restrictive.

Article 60

The five-day incubation period of cholera as provided in this article represents the maximum as far as this disease is concerned and may be acceptable for administrative purposes.

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Article 61

Paragraph 2 provides that any standard of anticholera vaccine in force in the territory where vaccination is performed shall be acceptable. The standard of vaccination varies widely in many countries. The variation is in the preparation of the number of organisms per milliliter and in the other complements or contents of the vaccine. It is safe therefore to assume that antibody response to these varying preparations may differ. It is necessary at this time to establish definite standards of vaccination and vaccines for all health administrations to follow. An assessment of vaccines has already been undertaken. In two months time, an assessment of other procedures will be made. It is imperative that specific standards in vaccines and vaccination be set up to afford passengers maximum protection.

The validity of a cholera vaccination certificate begins six days after the first injection and is valid for six months thereafter. This particular provision has placed restrictions on travel and it does not meet the objectives of the International Sanitary Regulations (ISR) of maximum security with the minimum interference with passenger traffic. It is felt that the six-day period required for a cholera certificate to become valid is not justified and poses too many problems. It is therefore recommended that the health certificate of adults who had at one time or another, a cholera vaccination, be valid on the date of the injection.

Paragraph 3

The surveillance of persons coming from infected areas is a tedious and a difficult procedure. Isolation, in order to be effective must be properly done by qualified and diligent personnel. When the passenger traffic is heavy, such procedure depletes the resources of a quarantine station and the logistics to support this particular disease becomes too heavy. Isolation is

also restrictive in view of the fact that if strictly followed, it must cover the incubation period of the disease which is five days. The problems it poses are great. The benefits of surveillance and isolation are not commensurate with the logistics necessary to support the two health disciplines. It is recommended that instead of these two measures, notification cards be issued to individuals who have valid certificates of vaccination upon their arrival from infected areas. If a passenger arrives without a cholera vaccination certificate, he should be immunized and issued a notification card.

Article 68

This particular paragraph has been used to ban certain imports from infected areas and has interfered with trade in some areas. The provision for fish has been taken in its broad term so that fish, which cannot be eaten in a raw state, has also been included in restrictions. Dried fish and fish in a cooked or canned state has been included in this ban on imports. This also pertains to sharkfinac. The restrictions were also applied indiscriminately to fruits. There are many fruits in its natural state that cannot transmit the vibrio in the normal course of trade. It is my opinion that most fruits are incapable of transmitting the vibrio and these restrictions should be redefined. It seems that vibrios can survive for a longer period of time on vegetables. It is therefore necessary that this provision be reconsidered and vegetables be allowed to be exported under certain conditions such as disinfection.

Article 69

Paragraph 1. No person shall be required to submit to rectal swabbing. This particular paragraph should definitely be maintained and enforced without any reservations.

Paragraph 2. This paragraph provides for stool examination of persons arriving from infected areas with symptoms indicative of cholera. While this is a valid provision, it should be observed with caution.

Many countries have abused this particular article and required rectal swabbing of passengers arriving from infected areas which is a violation of Article 69. The violations encountered show that it has not been an effective barrier against the transmission of the disease. It has, moreover, resulted in many problems in international traffic.

The provisions of the articles in the ISR pertaining to cholera are inadequate and need thorough review. These provisions should be strengthened and, as far as those provisions where abuses have been observed are concerned, a relaxation of the ineffective measures should be effected. The danger in minimizing the conditions set forth in the articles pertaining to cholera is that the International Sanitary Regulations is weakened as a whole. This could cause much confusion in trade and passenger traffic. It is therefore necessary that the Cholera Expert Committee and the International Quarantine Committee review and if necessary revise some of these provisions.