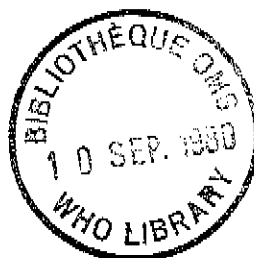




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HEALTH EDUCATION FOR HEALTH WORKERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC
AND THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION ON LABORATORY SERVICES

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Proper education of consumers and users would undoubtedly help not only to improve the social status of the laboratory within the general health system but also to make this tool more operational and more efficient.

However, if the information intended for the general public or for medical workers is to be genuinely educational it must avoid the sensationalism the biologist is all too often tempted to employ, perhaps from a desire to emerge from behind the shadow cast by the physician and blow his own trumpet a little. Such information should rather concentrate on the laboratory's place in the unified whole represented by the health care system, each component of which supports and depends on the others.

It is important for the public to know that the diagnosis and treatment of a disease is the end-result of a whole series of procedures, all equally important regardless of whether they are the work of the physician, the radiologist, the biologist, the rehabilitation specialist, or their paramedical counterparts.

It is no less important, and can even be extremely useful, for the public to be made aware, through visual media and the spoken and written word, that the absence of disease is another by-product of the laboratory and results from its constant monitoring of our physical, biological and chemical environment.

Hence efforts to educate the public and the users of laboratory services should be directed to the concept of medicine in the round or, more properly, as a comprehensive health care system. This means that, where it is necessary, in certain specific cases, to focus attention on laboratory services, it should be a general rule to avoid treating them as a peripheral aspect of the other components of the system under consideration.

This approach to the task of informing the public, and health workers too, has the advantage of drawing attention more effectively to the contribution the clinical laboratory makes to medicine and to public health and indicating its limits and the possibilities for its further development.

It will, in particular, serve to alert the population and those making use of laboratory services (be they physicians or medical auxiliaries) to the existence of specific health problems, and mobilize them for appropriate action. The ideal to aim at is to arrive, by the provision of appropriate information, at a state where, say, in areas where malaria is still prevalent, both the physician and the patient with fever think of a blood test, in areas where tuberculosis is prevalent, a search for the tubercule bacillus occurs both to the patient with cough and his medical adviser, and that from a given age gynaecological examinations should where possible be accompanied by a cytological test.

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In the context of this "all-round" information, the laboratory would thus become the channel for mass health campaigns of greater efficiency, effectiveness and measurability.

The second advantage that could result from this approach to information would be to improve the social standing of the biologist in relation to the physician, by drawing attention to the biologist's contribution to the solution of medical or health problems, and thus attract students to clinical laboratory work.

Finally, the last but not the least result would be to moderate the views of those, both among physicians and the general public, who think the laboratory can get to the bottom of all today's medical problems and unravel the secrets of tomorrow's diseases. In particular, the batteries of tests run for check-up purposes, which have been shown to yield little in relation to their cost, would be taken at their proper worth.

Thus educational information must make a point of showing that the clinical laboratory and the biologist are an integral part of any comprehensive health system, not just for "cultural" reasons but also to improve their image and serve as a generating force for health activity.

However, this educational information will be incomplete and ineffective unless it is also, if not primarily, aimed at the biologist so that he may be led to make the laboratory an integral component of the health system and thus to make his services more relevant. This action cannot but render his contribution to health more effective, inter alia, through what he brings to epidemiology, health information and education of the public, including (why not?) those using his services.

In actual fact, it is only as the biologist finds his place in the comprehensive health system and becomes an integral part of it that information of the public and education of other specialists in the health field will become feasible. For education on the role of laboratory services is a task that can be fulfilled only by biologists themselves, provided they are convinced of the merits of a comprehensive health service, experienced in public health matters and close to clinical practice.

From this standpoint, the preparation of biologists to play their part in a comprehensive and integrated health system can only foster productive relations between those working in clinical laboratories and those using their services.

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