VIRUS DISEASES AND VACCINE STUDIES

The most important event of 1957 in the field of virus diseases and vaccine studies was the occurrence of the influenza pandemic which subjected the WHO Influenza Programme to its most serious test since its inception in 1947. The WHO Programme successfully performed the functions for which it was developed. In just under three weeks after WHO received the first news that a significant epidemic was occurring, the agency was able to inform health authorities and vaccine-producing laboratories that the responsible virus was unrelated to all previously isolated strains and that existing vaccines were unlikely to give protection. The warning was given in time for many countries to prepare their health services to face the impending epidemic. In a number of countries significant quantities of vaccine were produced in time for use before the epidemic struck. Fortunately, the disease remained mild up to the time of writing. A close watch for any sign of increasing virulence was maintained.

A second meeting of the Expert Committee on Poliomyelitis was held in July. Particularly important was the recommendation by the Committee that live attenuated poliovirus vaccines should be subjected to more extensive and carefully designed trials. Its report also contained extensive annexes giving guidance on the latest laboratory techniques.

Initial steps were taken for the development of a programme of co-ordinated research on arthropod-borne virus diseases (i.e., those carried by various insects) particularly the group B encephalitis viruses, which include yellow fever and the Russian-spring-summer-like viruses.

Details of the method of preparation of a highly stable dried smallpox vaccine were distributed during the year and assistance was given to a number of countries wishing to initiate production of the vaccine. Arrangements were made for the preparation of large batches of stable dried typhoid vaccines for use in further field trials and eventually for consideration as reference standards.

OTHER COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Acute diarrhoeal diseases are the greatest single cause of infant mortality on a world-wide basis. In recent years, activities against these diseases have been intensified in the various WHO regions, and the Americas Region particularly gave high priority to the problem of controlling diarrhoeal diseases by organizing a seminar, by improving sanitation methods and by preventing the death of children in its child-care programme.

Following the African Conference on Bilharziasis, held late in 1956, the interest of some countries in the African Region has been stimulated to undertake pilot control projects. Large collections of different species of the vector snails have been sent to the three WHO Snail Identification Centres.

In the field of the control of communicable eye diseases, satisfactory progress has been achieved towards integrating the internationally assisted control campaigns in Morocco and Tunisia with the national public health services. Pilot trials have been completed in Taiwan and started in Spain, India and Indonesia.

More leprosy projects were undertaken, most of them in co-operation with UNICEF. With the increase in non-infectious cases, more attention had to be paid to physical and social rehabilitation.

The first WHO-assisted onchocerciasis project was started in 1957 in the Sudan. (Onchocerciasis is an insect-borne disease, an important cause of blindness in some countries.) Two training courses in onchocerciasis-control techniques have been started in Africa, the courses being combined with a course of training in countering malaria.

Field projects on sylvatic plague (i.e., plague spread by wild rodents) have been continued in India and Indonesia and encouraged in other countries.

NURSING

The Manual on Nursing Service Administration was completed in 1957, and it is expected that it will be widely used to help strengthen the administrative aspects of nursing service. Being planned during the year was a Guide for Planning Basic Nursing Education Programmes; a consultant prepared a draft which was discussed by a group of nurses meeting in Tokyo.

The bibliography of text and reference books suggested for basic and post-basic nursing edu-