



Pan American Health Organization
Regional Office of the
World Health Organization

Division of Disease Prevention and Control
Program on Communicable Diseases (HCP/HCT)

PAHO/HCP/HCT/237
Original: Spanish

Executive Report:

Subregional Meeting of the Central American Network for Prevention and Control of Emerging and Reemerging Disease (RECACER)



(Costa Rica, 21–22 February 2002)

This document was presented during the Subregional Meeting on Emerging and Reemerging Diseases, 21–22 February 2001, San José, Costa Rica, organized by the PAHO Program on Communicable Diseases, Division of Disease Prevention and Control. The National Directors of Epidemiology and Chiefs of Laboratory Services from all Central American countries, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic participated in the meeting. The final version incorporates the contributions of the countries to the original working document.

Background and Rationale

Since 1992, as a result of the reintroduction of cholera in the Region, the Ministers of Health of Central America have been formalizing agreements on epidemiological surveillance at of COMISCA and RESSCAD meetings. Emphasis has been placed on the high potential for the spread of communicable diseases throughout our countries, recognizing that these events require coordinated actions by various public health services for their prevention and control, as well as a joint effort by the countries to reduce their impact and the speed with which they spread.

In March 2001, a technical meeting was held with the Directors of Epidemiology from the Ministries of Health, the Directors of the Laboratory Network, and Program Managers from the different agencies providing international technical cooperation. At this meeting, there was a clear need to implement an operational entity to help promote the decisions made by the health authorities within the framework of the Central American Integration System (SICA). Taking into account the imminent threat of the introduction of new diseases and the resurgence of others in the subregion, the Central American Network for Emerging and Reemerging Diseases (RECACER) was born. In each country, RECACER set its plan into motion through National Technical Groups, whose institutional link is represented by the Bureau of Epidemiology of the Ministries of Health and the Director of the corresponding national network of public-health laboratories.

In October 2001, in Guatemala, the First Scientific Meeting on Emerging and Reemerging Diseases was held. Participants reviewed the progress made in the development and operation of the National Technical Groups (*Grupos Técnicos Nacionales*, or GTNs).

In February 2002, the Second Meeting of the Coordinating Committee of RECACER was held in Costa Rica, host country of RESSCAD.

Participating Countries

Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama

Absent: Haiti and Belize.

Objectives of the Meeting

- ❖ Discuss the progress made by the National Technical Groups to strengthen national and subregional capacity for the surveillance, prevention and control of emerging, and reemerging infectious diseases (EID).

- ❖ Review the activities and results of actions developed by the Subregional Post-Mitch Project component insofar as they relate to emerging and reemerging diseases.
- ❖ Prepare the follow-up agenda for the RECACER Coordinating Committee.

Country Presentation

The majority of the countries have shown progress in advancing the Constitution of the National Technical Groups, some with multisectoral representation and others still limited to the services of the Ministry of Health and its sections.

The countries of the subregion exhibit different conditions related to their level of social and economic development and health infrastructure. As a result, they present different levels of vulnerability to emerging and reemerging diseases.

With post-Mitch resources available, there was a start-up of activities related to reviewing health and public-health regulation and legislation, setting national priorities for emerging and reemerging diseases, social response and the current state of public-health services for preventing and controlling EIDs.

All countries have defined their priority EIDs.

All countries have prepared their workplans tailored to the characteristics and special features of the organizational and functional structure of their health services as well as the availability of existing resources. The majority of countries agreed on the low impact of the current national dengue control strategies, thus acknowledging the need to rethink such alternative strategies as community participation.

With regard to surveillance information systems, the network has not managed to achieve high coverage. There has been improvement, however, in the timeliness and quality of data.

All countries have drawn their epidemiological surveillance laboratories into the network and strengthened them in terms of equipment, providing resources, standards and manuals and implementing quality-control systems. All the laboratories in the subregion now exchange technical information, though integrating the subregional laboratory network has not yet been possible.

Presentation of the Regional Programs

The Programs presented the results obtained in subregional project components concerned with

- Laboratories
- Human-resource education and training: PAHO and CDC
- The INFOCOM Platform

Future Operational and Technical Agenda

Agreements

- That the Coordinating Committee should rotate in tune with RESSCAD.

Suggestions Made by Participants for Network Activities

- Prepare emergency treatment (alert/rapid-response) protocols for preventing and controlling communicable diseases of epidemic potential, for use in the countries participating in RECACER.
- Prepare inventories on the human-resource and technological capacity of the laboratories in areas related to EID prevention and control.
- Stimulate the utilization of experts from the subregion in consultancies to other countries.
- Look for funding and sustainable financing mechanisms to support subregional activities.

Technical Agreements

Taking dengue as an axis for action—it currently being a priority in the subregion—each country was assigned specific responsibilities for preparing project proposals on research, surveillance and control, training, laboratories, and information/communication.

Research: The Dominican Republic and Panama

- Formulate a subregional entomological project focusing on aspects related to vector behavior.
- Conduct ethnographic studies and review planned community-participation projects.
- Conduct studies on cost-effectiveness of rapid diagnostic tests in border areas.
- Review research carried out to date

Surveillance and Control: Guatemala and El Salvador

- Prepare proposal to do as much as possible to harmonize case definitions, surveillance protocols, DHF laboratory-diagnoses and case management standards, evaluation guides, and strategies for community participation.

Training: Costa Rica

- Prepare training guides for community groups/organizations for evaluation and monitoring.
- Prepare a training proposal, with entomological contents and methodology, for entomologists and/or entomological technicians.

Laboratory: Honduras (training)

- Laboratory Performance Evaluation Process.
- Quality-control training in CDC-Puerto Rico for laboratory and epidemiology professionals.
- Proposal for evaluating rapid diagnostic tests.

Exchange of Information: Nicaragua and Honduras

- Incorporate laboratory results within INFOCOM platform prior to defining and agreeing upon what information needs to be shared.
- Define alternative channels of communication for laboratories (e.g. e-mail).
- Selectively review public-health information to include in INFOCOM.

Deadline for the preparation and delivery of proposals: **31 May 2002.**

Other Agreements

- Second Scientific Meeting in El Salvador to be held in November 2002.
- Establishment of the HCT/SHA Listserv.
- The countries, PAHO, PAHO Country Offices and Regional Programs should mobilize resources for financing projects approved by the Network Coordinating Committee.
- The Committee should prepare a progress report on RECACER activities, to be presented at the next PRERESSCAD meeting and subsequently to RESSCAD.
- The next meeting of the Coordinating Committee will be in November 2002 at the Scientific Meeting in El Salvador.