



## PROLOGUE

Since 1980 the importance of acute respiratory infections (ARI) as a cause of sickness and death has led most developing countries to identify ARI among the principal health problems that affect children. Because of this, ARI control is among the priority actions that should be implemented and strengthened in all countries of the Region of the Americas.

The complex problems that ARI present—several different etiologies, the need for a variety of treatments, and significant complications—have led to more integrated and focused support to countries for the prevention and management of these cases. Thus, the Regional ARI Control Program was established at the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in 1983 as a major line of technical cooperation.

More recently, control of ARI was included in an essential chapter among the goals set forth at the 1990 World Conference for Children, which brought together representatives from most countries of the world. The countries there signed commitments to reduce by one-third the current mortality from pneumonia by the year 2000. This was one of the six major goals for children's health, with specific objectives to be met in 1995 and by the end of the twentieth century. Countries with the highest infant mortality (over 40 per 1,000 live births), to which mortality from ARI largely contributes, were the priority focus of in-country program activities between 1992 and 1995.

This international commitment was ratified by the developing countries of the Americas in 1994 at the Summit of the Americas held in Miami. Backing was given for control actions to reduce mortality from pneumonia, within the framework of the commitment to eradicating poverty and discrimination in the Hemisphere.

Implementation of ARI control actions became a regular topic in major international forums and conferences, underscoring the importance ascribed to this problem. As the countries were making efforts to strengthen ARI control activities, international organizations emphasized the need to establish specific goals that would help to define the direction of these actions.

One of the goals of the Regional Program for ARI Control of PAHO has been to support countries in the establishment of national programs to reduce this mortality through the correct use

of standard case management for ARI, particularly in the reduction of morbidity and mortality from pneumonia. Training in the early recognition of pneumonias needs to be geared toward community health workers as well as medical and nursing professionals. Furthermore, it would be advisable to have a substantial health education component geared toward family members, so that they can get care from a health care provider when the child needs it, particularly when warning signs are present.

In addition to technical and clinical training for health personnel, PAHO has promoted other activities, including a number of courses and seminars for managers of ARI programs; the development and distribution of case management standards; and the publication of manuals and other materials including training modules for instructors, hospital staff, primary care personnel, and community health workers.

PAHO has supported research on diagnostic criteria for pneumonia in infants and children; ethnographic studies on the behavior of families that seek medical care for sick children; and research on the efficiency and effectiveness of health services in the prevention and control of ARI. Other research that is under way includes a study on *Streptococcus pneumoniae* serotypes that may have a considerable impact on types of bacterial pneumonia and contribute to the essential role of vaccines in the prevention of pneumonia, which is a cause of ARI mortality.

ARI control has thus become one of the most important elements in the global effort to improve the quality of pediatric health care in developing countries. Therefore, a broad exchange in all the areas related to ARI will help to foster better quality health services with the features and outcomes sought at the local level: fairness, effectiveness, and efficiency.

We believe that the present volume can make a valuable contribution to this process with a comprehensive, forward-looking focus consistent with the health policy positions mentioned above. This book also represents an attempt to contribute to improvements in the technical capabilities of all the sectors involved in the control, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of ARI in children throughout the Americas.

The Pan American Health Organization, through its Program on Communicable Diseases in the Division of Disease Prevention and Control, presents this multidisciplinary work in the hope that the publication of these reviews and initial studies will promote greater knowledge in this area and encourage further research and attention to the health needs of the children in our Region, ultimately contributing to reductions in infant mortality.



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