

Anthropology Applied to Health Programs

The problem of applying the results of anthropological research to improvements in the delivery of health services in developing nations was the topic of a lively symposium held on 29 and 30 June 1973 during the international meetings arranged by the AAAS and the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT). The symposium was a reflection of the increasingly close relationship among some physicians active in the teaching of medicine, anthropologists engaged in empirical studies of cultural and social dimensions of health care, and administrators of national health programs.

The symposium was comprised of four sessions, each of which was well attended by physicians, administrators of both of Mexico's major public health systems—the national social security administration (Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social) and the ministry of health (Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia Pública)—medical students, and anthropologists. Each session was structured to ensure participation by both anthropologists and those who provide health care.

The first session (chaired by a physician, L. A. Vargas) was devoted to discussion of some of the ways in which studies by physical anthropologists are of utility to the physician. The first paper presented was "Use of infant growth patterns based on longitudinal studies of healthy children" by J. Faulhaber (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City). R. Malina (University of Texas, Austin) presented a data paper "Growth and infantile status in Oaxaca"; C. Serrano (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia) made suggestions with respect to the "Application of paleopathological studies to modern medicine"; and Vargas (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City) reported on the "Application of somatotype studies to preventive medicine."

The second session (chaired by A. J. Rubel, an anthropologist) consisted of four papers which explored relationships between the values and logic of university-trained physicians and those of the people they serve. A physician (H. Fabrega, Jr., of Michigan State University, East Lansing) posed the question of whether the study of the sociocultural dimensions of healer-patient relationships was a

more proper subject for study by those in medicine or by social scientists in his paper "Medical anthropology: A medical or a social science?" Rubel (Michigan State University) and C. W. O'Neill (Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana) reported some results of an epidemiological investigation of a folk illness known as "soul loss illness"—*susto*. Their paper, "The meaning of soul loss illness," compared the degree of social, psychiatric, and organic impairment of rural Mexicans diagnosed as suffering from soul loss illness with similar characteristics indicated by control groups from the same three villages whose illness complaints did not implicate a loss of soul. The data support the hypothesis that those suffering from *susto* are characterized by greater impairment of social role effectiveness, but not by greater psychiatric difficulties. Final conclusions await scoring of the data on organic illness. In a related paper, C. Penichet (California State University at Los Angeles) offered some reasons why folk healers continue to play so important a healing role in developing nations like Mexico in his paper "*Curanderismo*: An objective continental reality." Then, using data obtained from the Human Relations Area Files, S. Nerlove (Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) proposed a method by which health planners might predict the relative rapidity with which mothers in horticultural groups will introduce their infants to foods intended to supplement breast-feeding in her paper "The role of women in the introduction of supplementary food."

The third session was chaired by a physician (R. Collado Ardón) and was devoted to discussion of some results of Collado Ardón's national survey of the attitudes and opinions which Mexican physicians hold with respect to the current delivery of health care in Mexico.

Among the matters the physicians considered was the way in which public and private medicine in Mexico should relate to folk healers; physicians' opinions were described by Collado Ardón and J. E. García Torres (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) in their paper "La actitud de los médicos en México respecto a los curanderos." Of the 2487 physicians interviewed by Collado Ardón and

García Torres, 43 percent were in "total opposition" to folk healers, although a surprising 33 percent were in favor of, or tolerant of, inclusion of these lay healers in some total system of health care delivery, especially in rural areas.

Those discussions prepared the way for the concluding session, chaired by anthropologist A. López Austin. There were no formal presentations in this session; it was devoted to consideration of how the methodology and results of anthropological research can and should be utilized to better advantage by the medical profession. Intense, concerned, and spirited audience discussion ranged the gamut from suggestions for the incorporation of some anthropological methods into the curricula of medical schools to the necessity for rural practitioners serving Indian patients to learn at least those dimensions of the indigenous culture which help determine patients' responses to disease symptoms.

The extent of audience participation and the interest with which questions were asked and answered indicated increased involvement on the part of Mexican physicians and administrators of health delivery systems in the kinds of information made available for their needs by anthropology. As part of the international colloquium, "Science and man in the Americas," this symposium helped ensure increasingly close ties between those who investigate the social and cultural dimensions of health problems and those who can put that information to best use.

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Forthcoming Events

September

9-10. Congress on **Occupational Health**, 34th annual, American Medical Assoc., Chicago, Ill. (H. F. Howe, AMA Dept. of Environmental, Public, and Occupational Health, 535 N. Dearborn St., Chicago 60610)

9-11. **Neurophysin Proteins: Carriers of Peptide Hormones** Conf., New York Acad. of Sciences, New York, N.Y. (R. Walter, Dept. of Physiology and Biophysics, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York)

9-11. **Pollution Engineering**, 3rd intern. congr., Chicago, Ill. (Clapp & Poliak, Inc., Exposition Management, 245 Park Ave., New York 10017)

9-11. **Transport Mechanisms in the**