

CONFERENCE ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN PRAGUE JUBILEE

This year 70 years have elapsed since foundation of the Institute of Public Health in Prague and this event was also recalled on the conference convened to celebrate this occasion. Below are presented abstracts of presentations of heads of divisions of this Institute. In their contributions speakers wanted to reflect how new changes in trends in preventive medicine and envisaged new health care system would influence the prospective goals and scope of the work of the National Public Health Institute by the year 2000 and after.

EPIDEMIOLOGY AND MICROBIOLOGY

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Division of Epidemiology and Microbiology

The Department for Epidemiology and Microbiology had operated within the National Institute of Public Health since the establishment of the latter in 1925. Together with the Department of Sera and Vaccines they represented the basis of the Institute. Doctor, and then Professor, Karel Raška became its head in 1939.

Soon after the World War II the Department for Epidemiology and Microbiology started to create its subsidiary centres in all Czech regions. They performed microbiological diagnosis and basic antiepidemic activities in their localities. In 1952, after the disintegration of the National Institute of Public Health, this department was transformed into the Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology and Professor Raška was designated again as its head. In 1972, this Institute was integrated into the Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology as the Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology. In 1992, the National Institute of Public Health was reestablished with the Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology as its part.

Czech Microbiology and Epidemiology were always highly appreciated in the light of the results achieved, e.g. thanks to adoption of appropriate vaccination strategy and its modification according to serological surveys, objective study of vaccination rates. Obligatory vaccination against diphtheria started in 1946 is worth meaning, too. In addition, it is interesting to note that at the turn of the 1950's and the 1960's the American researcher Sabin cooperated with a research team of the Institute for Sera and Vaccines and the Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology on production and testing of a live poliovaccine. This vaccine was used in 1960 in a nation-wide vaccination campaign which stopped the spread of this infection among Czech population. Twenty years later, the world-wide eradication of variola was based on the Professor Raška's WHO project in which 6 epidemiologists of the Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology were involved.

Cooperation with the World Health Organization is one of the major international activities of the Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology. Practically each of 24 National Reference Laboratories cooperates with WHO and/or other leading establishments in this field. At present, 4 WHO cooperating centres operate within the Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology.

Since 1960 one of three WHO Sera Reference Banks has been part of the Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology. Sera from 17 countries of Europe, Africa and Asia have been

deposited there. Together with respective reference laboratories analysing different antibodies this bank played an important role in the national immunization programmes organized by WHO or the governments of different countries.

With the transformation of the health care system in the Czech Republic the necessity emerged to organize the External Quality Assessment at the nation-wide level, as conducted in all developed countries. The Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology started its activities in this qualitatively and quantitatively new system in 1993. Up to date 8950 coded samples of infectious agents or sera in 28 series were distributed to different laboratories for detection of agents and antibodies. At present 254 laboratories undergo this testing while the laboratories of the Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology are tested within the international control EQUAS organized by the PHLS Colindale.

New system of reporting infectious diseases and epidemiological data processing using the software EPI-Info have been worked out. To implement them into practice it was necessary to equip the epidemiological departments, not only of the Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology but also of all epidemiological departments of the district hygiene stations, with computers and appropriate software and to train their personnel. At present, the data, initially communicated on disks, have been weekly E-mailed. For this purpose a BBS station was established in the Center of Epidemiology and Microbiology.

The data obtained and the comments of the Regional Hygiene Stations are monthly processed and issued as the CEM bulletins, regularly including also NRL reports, epidemiological world news and other interesting data from the fields of epidemiology, microbiology and infections. The CEM bulletins are distributed to more than 400 subscribers in the Czech Republic and elsewhere.

Epidemiological groups are involved also in postgraduate training of specialists. In cooperation with London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and 3rd Medical Faculty, Charles University, three international courses of epidemiology were organized at the National Institute of Public Health in the last three years for more than 60 participants. In addition, two summer schools for more than 140 participants of the Central and East European countries were organized. All these activities were successful and were highly appreciated by the Ministries of health of different countries and the WHO.