

CONFERENCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Fifth Commonwealth Medical Conference was held in Wellington, New Zealand, from 15 to 25 November 1977.

Previous Commonwealth Medical Conferences had been held in Britain (Edinburgh, 1965), Uganda (Kampala, 1968), Mauritius (Port Louis, 1971) and Sri Lanka (Colombo, 1974). The offer of the Government of New Zealand to host the 1977 Conference was made at the Colombo Conference, and was later accepted with appreciation by other Commonwealth Governments at the 1975 meeting of Commonwealth representatives prior to the World Health Assembly (the Pre-WHA Meeting), in Geneva.

Preparations for the Wellington Conference began in 1975 when the Pre-WHA Meeting gave preliminary consideration to the theme and topics. These, and the proposed arrangements for the Conference, were further discussed by the Conference Liaison Committee, composed of representatives of Commonwealth Governments in London, and by the Pre-WHA Meetings in Geneva in both 1976 and 1977. The 1977 Pre-WHA Meeting approved a revised provisional agenda for the Conference.

As a result of these discussions, and also of suggestions made by the Secretariat and by the chief officers of Commonwealth health agencies when they met with officers of the Secretariat in March 1977, the scope of the Conference, which was at first envisaged as embracing the contribution of youth and health and nutrition, was widened to include participation in health development by the community as a whole, and the relationship between ministries of health and medical schools, and changing health delivery systems. An annotated provisional agenda was prepared by the Secretariat with the assistance of the doctor members of the Liaison Committee in London, and was circulated to Governments, who were invited to contribute background papers on the various items.

The 1977 Pre-WHA Meeting also approved the choice of the lead speaker, and decided that the Minister of Health of Liberia should again be invited to attend the Conference as a guest, and that the Commonwealth Nurses Federation should be invited to attend as an observer.

Administrative arrangements for the Conference, on which the Secretariat and the New Zealand Department of Health had been jointly engaged since 1975, were also approved. The Commonwealth Secretary-General was responsible for the general organisation of the Conference in collaboration with the Government of New Zealand. The New Zealand Government was responsible for the provision of Conference accommodation (at the James Cook Hotel in Wellington) and for security, communications, transport, office equipment, furniture and stationery. It provided minute writers and secretarial staff to reinforce the small Secretariat party, and also liaison officers who were assigned to delegations to assist them with arrival formalities, local facilities and sightseeing. Heads of delegations, the Commonwealth Secretary-General and the Assistant Secretary-General were the guests of the New Zealand Government, which bore the cost of their accommodation and of tours undertaken by them. The generous support and co-operation contributed by the Government of New Zealand were greatly appreciated by all delegations and by the Secretariat.

The New Zealand Minister of Health, Air Commodore the Hon. T. F. Gill, was chairman of the Conference, which was attended by delegations from 29 Commonwealth countries, most of them headed by Ministers of Health, and by a representative of the East Caribbean Associated States. Delegations included permanent secretaries, chief medical officers and the heads of university medical schools. Observers were present from the World Health Organisation, the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the Commonwealth Nurses Federation.

The Conference was opened by the Rt. Hon. B. E. Talboys, Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, at a ceremony at which delegates were welcomed by Air Commodore Gill and the Conference was also addressed by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, H. E. Mr. Shridath Ramphal, and the Hon. Gamini Jayasuriya, Minister of Health, Sri Lanka. Professor Silas Dodu, of Ghana, was the lead speaker.

After initial country statements had been made by heads of delegations in plenary, the main work of the Conference was done by three committees, each with a chairman and vice-chairman

elected by the Conference. Each committee was representative of all regions of the Commonwealth; the larger delegations were free to be represented on all three committees and the smaller delegations were free to move between committees.

A steering committee to monitor the progress of the Conference, consisting of the Conference chairman, the chairmen and vice-chairmen of committees and senior officials of the Secretariat, was formed at the preliminary meeting of heads of delegations at which the Conference agenda and programme were adopted. It was decided that a summary record of country statements made in plenary should not be prepared, but that the texts of speeches should be included in an annex to the main Conference report.

The responsibilities of the three committees were as follows:

Committee A Chairman: Dr. W. G. B. Casselman (Canada)

Vice-Chairman: Dr. P. I. Boyd (East Caribbean Associated States)

Agenda item I : Review of action taken following the Fourth Commonwealth Medical Conference, including the reports on brain drain, maintenance and repair of medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and abortion law and practice.

Agenda item VI : Enhancing Commonwealth collaboration in the health sector.

Committee B Chairman: Dr. C. Gopalan (India)

Vice-Chairman: Prof. J. J. A. Reid (Britain)

Agenda item II : Community participation.

Agenda item III : Food and nutrition.

Committee C Chairman: Mr. E. A. B. Mayne (Ghana)

Vice-Chairman: Prof. L. A. G. Davidson (Australia)

Agenda item IV : The role of ministries of health and medical schools.

Agenda item V : Changing health care delivery systems.

The reports of the three committees were presented and considered when the Conference reassembled in plenary and, as then amended and adopted, they together constitute the formal report of the Conference.

The closing speech was made on behalf of the Commonwealth Secretary-General by the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. E. C. Anyaoku. The Conference Secretary was Professor Sir Kenneth Stuart, Medical Adviser, Commonwealth Secretariat.