

The History of ASPHER

1968 – 1993

Dr. Tom Landheer, honorary member ASPHER

Dr. Alexander W. Macara, former Secretary General ASPHER

The Regional Office of WHO for Europe under Dr. Leo Kaprio held discussions during 1966 and 1967 with leading figures in schools of public health, including schools for tropical hygiene, as part of a worldwide initiative to set up Regional Associations of Schools in every WHO region as a channel for initiating innovative policies. A meeting was held in Ankara in 1967 which appointed a provisional committee: President, Professor Jean Cayla, Rennes, France; Vice-President, Professor Frans Doeleman, Leiden, Netherlands; Secretary General, Dr. Theodore Gjurgjevic, was a former diplomat with doctorates in literature and law from Oxford and was fluent in every major European Language.

The inaugural General Assembly was organised, with the support of Dr. Kaprio and his Officer for Education and Training, Dr. James Gallagher, in Zagreb in October 1968. Statutes were approved and a varied programme was offered, including a lecture on evaluation of teaching by Dr. Macara of Bristol. A memorable excursion to a health centre accommodating the local GP, dentist and midwife. The most animated discussions were held in cellars in which the local plum brandy was produced and sampled.

Simultaneous translation was provided, in the best traditions of WHO: it was not clear who paid the bill. The original name of the Organisation was AIRESSPE (Association des Institutions Responsable pour l'Enseignement Supérieur de la Santé Publique en Europe). Most European countries were represented as well as Algeria and Egypt.

The Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam held the next biennial General Assembly under the Presidency of Professor Christian Lucasse, establishing the tradition of the incoming President hosting the meeting at his own School. Dr. Landheer assumed the daunting task of raising the considerable funds required, not least for simultaneous translation, with the co-operation of the national Government and School. WHO provided Advisers, including colleagues from the USA. The main theme of the meeting was teaching methods, and an excursion was organised to the Rotterdam region which was pioneering research into the control of environmental pollution.

Dr. Bengt Lambert, Director of the modest sized Nordic School of Public Health, offered to arrange the Third General Assembly in Gothenburg, but his plans were aborted by a misunderstanding over national funding support. WHO Euro came to the rescue, with Dr. Gallagher organising the General Assembly in its Headquarters in August 1973 under the titular chairmanship of Professor BO Holma of Copenhagen University. The main theme was the responsibility of schools and department of public health in health care evaluation. There were particularly lively contributions from several "young turks" including Patrick Hamilton of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The Association's name was changed to ASPHER as a neater acronym.

The Fourth General Assembly, held in Brussels in September 1975 with Professor Graffar of the Free University in the chair, was constituted as a Working Group of WHO Euro. The Report, which was written by Dr. Gallagher and Dr. Macara, was published under

the title, "Training Manpower for Health Administrations; a report of the Working Group on Specific Problems of Schools of Public Health".

It was agreed to drop simultaneous translation because its high cost could not be justified when English had become a *lingua franca*.

Dr. Gjurgjevic appealed for assistance: Dr. Alexander Macara from Bristol was appointed Assistant Secretary General and Dr. Philippe Grandjean from Copenhagen Treasurer. Tragically, several months later Dr. Gjurgjevic had a fatal heart attack whilst visiting Libya in the pursuit of his heroic efforts to set up a world federation of schools of public health.

Dr. Alfred Eberwein, who had recently moved from WHO Euro to direct the Academy of Public Health in Düsseldorf, hosted the Fifth General Assembly there in September 1977. The meeting received reports of a number of highly successful workshops and seminars held in Brussels, Liverpool, London and Zagreb since the last meeting. Discussion about health services research led to the establishment of the European Collaborative Health Services Studies (ECHSS) under the auspices of ASPHER on the initiative of Professor Bob Logan of the LSHTM.

The Statutes were revised, with an Executive Board comprising the President, President-Elect and Secretary General, and attended by a representative of WHO Euro. Dr. Macara, who had been acting as Secretary General, was confirmed in the post.

A number of further meetings were held between General Assemblies, notably a Conference in Sarajevo in May 1979 on "Systems Analysis in National Health Services, with special reference to consumer-provider relationships", which attracted several hundred participants.

The Sixth General Assembly was held in London in the autumn of 1979, with the Dean of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Dr. Gordon Smith, in the chair. It was the most ambitious and well attended meeting to date, with a programme covering developments in education, training and research. In accordance with the tradition which had already become established Dr. Kaprio, as Regional Director of WHO Euro, addressed the meeting. He highlighted the crisis of identity of public health in Europe, the new problems of communicable disease control, the need to forge strong links between health and social services, and to find more effective ways of communicating with politicians and the public. The first results of ECHSS were received with enthusiasm. The customary excursion to a "nucleus" hospital explored the vexed question of the right number and type of hospital beds.

The President of the next General Assembly in Leiden in the autumn of 1981 was Professor Frans Doeleman, one of the "founding fathers" of ASPHER. It was now traditional to have a tripartite programme: a review of the health care system in the host country; reports of activities since the previous Assembly; and general discussions.

The three main topics were: health policy research; the integration of theory and practice in public health education; and multidisciplinary training.

The meeting was notable for a formal agreement with WHO Euro to review management training in schools and departments of public health in Europe and to initiate a series of workshops designed to develop relevant programmes to meet changing health services needs. By now ECHSS was well established, with study centres in nine countries

at every point of the European compass. On the retirement of Professor Logan, Dr. Tom Landheer was appointed Director of Studies.

Dr. Landheer organised a panoramic excursion visiting the health services in reclaimed parts of the former Zuiderzee.

For some time ASPHER and WHO Euro had jointly been engaged in the effort to recruit active members from eastern Europe. This activity was stepped up after the Leiden meeting, and an early result was an invitation from the Central Institute for Advanced Medical Studies in Moscow to Professor Logan and Dr. Macara to contribute to its international courses.

Among other meetings, a workshop for French teachers of public health was held at the International Children's Centre in Paris at the invitation of Professor Manciaux.

Following the Leiden meeting, efforts in which ASPHER and WHO Euro had jointly been engaged to recruit eastern European Schools were stepped up. The first result was that the Centre for Advanced Medical Studies in Moscow invited Professor Logan and Dr. Macara to lecturer on its international courses.

Lisbon hosted the Eighth General Assembly in September 1983 under the Presidency of Professor Aloisio Coelho. The main theme was: "Health Systems of the '90s: preparing the people for new approaches; the role of schools of public health". The ECHSS was thriving, and the studies of health services management were proceeding well, largely due to the generosity of Professor Kroeger's Academy of Public Health in Düsseldorf in hosting workshops.

The excursion included a study of health centre provision in picturesque locations.

By 1985 Israel had joined the European Region of WHO and the Ninth General Assembly was held in Jerusalem in September, with Professor Michael Davies as President. Professor Davies drew upon his country's pioneering work in health care planning and research, with a particular focus upon the role of schools of public health in preparing for an ageing society.

ECHSS continued to provide new data resulting from close co-operation between the study centres. It was now organising six monthly workshops to evaluate the results and guide progress. The Health Management Training Project set up in Leiden had produced a definitive workbook as a comprehensive basic text for management training in schools of public health. WHO Euro had also commissioned the Association to prepare materials and case studies on motivation which were carried out by Dr. Frada Eskin and Dr. Lone de Neergaard.

Dr. Frada Eskin was appointed to assist Dr. Macara with the increased volume of work.

The obvious potential for excursions was fully exploited and included visits to model health care facilities and the obligatory Kibbutz.

The Tenth General Assembly was held in August 1987 and was divided between two centres, starting in Copenhagen with the assistance of WHO Euro and Professor Erik Holst. It then travelled by coach and ferry to Gothenburg where the incoming President, Professor Lennart Kohler's Nordic School now boasted superb quarters in the former Naval Academy.

In contrast to Jerusalem, the meeting drew upon the School's extensive work in relation to the health care needs of children. The meeting endorsed the establishment of a Joint Task Force between ASPHER and WHO Euro on the implementation of the "Health for All" philosophy and strategy in and through schools and departments of public health. It was agreed that the Task Force would prepare "educational dossiers" related to individual Health for All targets, or groups of targets.

The ECHSS report featured particularly Professor Doeleman's work, later to be published, on "A comparative study of eight European Area Health Centres".

The Executive Board had now grown to include the Past President, an additional Secretary General and the Director of the ECHSS.

Excursions, which interspersed the meeting, included a visit to a food processing factory located between the two centres, and an exploration, from the School's own pier, of the Gothenburg archipelago.

The interval before the next General Assembly saw a number of important developments in public health in Europe. The work of the Joint Task Force provided material for a meeting organised by WHO Euro, with the support of the Düsseldorf Academy, on the education and training of public health professionals. This meeting was attended by colleagues not previously involved in ASPHER. Subsequently, the Task Force was commissioned to prepare proposals for a European MPH. ASPHER contributed to a Ministerial Conference on Medical Education in Europe, held in Lisbon. The World Federation for Education and Research in Public Health was established following meetings in Cairo and Geneva, with Dr. Macara as Secretary General. In Britain, the Acheson Report on "The Public Health Function" consigned "community medicine" to the scrapheap, replacing it with "public health medicine".

ASPHER's 21st Birthday was celebrated in Budapest where the Eleventh General Assembly was held in 1989 under the Presidency of Professor Ivan Forgacs of the Postgraduate Medical Institute. The meeting was enlivened by many new members attracted by the higher profile of public health throughout Europe. This enthusiasm was expressed in the decision to hold General Assemblies annually and to revise the Statutes to widen participation. Dr. Eskin was appointed Secretary General to succeed Dr. Macara, who was absent through illness but had indicated his wish to demit office.

Professor Christian Rollet presided over the next General Assembly, in Rennes in August 1990, when the revision of the Statutes occupied an inordinate amount of time without any decision being reached. The Joint Task Force reported upon its activities, particularly in the promotion of the concept of curricula elements within the European MPH. The President reported on an offer by the French government to provide a permanent bureau in Paris, which was later to materialise at the beginning of 1992 with a half time secretary, Mme. de Fromont. ECHSS had to report disappointment in the failure of a subsidy from the EC to materialise. There were now 15 study centres and the work was proceeding but at a slower pace with a concentration upon tracer studies.

During the excursions participants learned how mussels from Dublin Bay were purified and how oysters purified themselves.

The 1991 General Assembly was held in Valencia under the Presidency of Professor Francisco Bolumar. It addressed three main topics: the European Masters Degree in Public

Health; the organisation and management of schools of public health; and teaching activities.

Members reserved their main interest for the Administrative meeting, which approved new Statutes drafted by the Executive Board. Several new faces appeared on the new enlarged Board. It was decided that the publication of a regular newsletter, which had been a feature of earlier years, should be revived, with publication twice yearly for an initial period of two years. Dr. Eskin demitted office and Dr. Bernard Junot subsequently agreed to act as Secretary General until the next General Assembly.

The Fourteenth General Assembly was held in Athens in October 1992, when Professor Jeffrey Levett of the Athens School of Public Health became the new President of ASPHER. The main themes were: curriculum development; public health in the Balkans; and the European nervous system. Members were pleased to see so many participants from the eastern European countries and from the Balkans. Dr. Evelyne de Leeuw, Ph.D., from Maastricht, was elected Secretary General.

During the meeting honorary doctorates and other academic awards were conferred upon Professor Kohler and Dr. Macara in recognition of their services to public health in Europe.

There was an excursion to Delphi, where the oracle wisely kept her counsel.

There was fierce competition for the privilege of hosting the next General Assembly. The choice fell upon Bielefeld, when Professor Ulrich Laaser will assume the Presidency for 1993.

It is intended that the 1995 General Assembly be held in Cracow under the presidency of Professor Andrzej Rys.