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 Conacyt (Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología). 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 impute 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.

ARTHUR J. RUBEL
Department of Anthropology, Michigan State University, East Lansing 48823

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)


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Nearshore Environment Conf., American Geophysical Union, Mystic, Conn. (J. F. Paskausky, Marine Sciences Inst., Univ. of Connecticut, Groton 06340)
11. American Ceramic Soc., Structural Clay Products Div. Lexington, Ky. (S. D. Red, ACS, 65 Ceramic Dr., Columbus, Ohio 43214)
11. American Assoc. for Automotive Medicine, Toronto, Ont., Canada (J. S. Carriere, 801 Green Bay Rd., Lake Bluff, Ill. 60044)
11. Magnetic Resonance in Biological Systems, 6th intern. conf., Amersfoort, Netherlands. (K. Wüthrich, Inst. for Molecular Biology and Biophysics, ETH-Honggerberg, CH-8049 Zürich, Switzerland)
11. International Atomic Energy, 10th congr., Hamburg, Germany. (P. van der Veer, Intern. Union of Pure and Applied Physics, Amsterdam, Netherlands; D. M. J. Groenendijk, Schering AG, D-0900 Halle, Germany)
11. International Congr. of Infections and Parasitic Diseases, Warsaw, Poland. (T. T. Kersitsch, 10-201 Warszawa, Warszawa, Poland)
11. Congress of Neurological Surgeons, Chicago, Ill. (R. G. Armstrong, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Mass.)
11. South American Soc. of Chemical Engineers, Basic Science and Nuclear Divs., Williamsburg, Va. (H. P. Reid, ACS, 65 Ceramic Dr., Columbus, Ohio 43214)
11. American Oil Chemists' Soc., Philadelphia, Pa. (J. C. Lyon, AOCS, 505 S. Sixth St., Champaign, Ill. 61820)
11. Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics, Montreal, P.Q., Canada. (J. K. Gillham, IBM-1 T. J. Watson Research Center, P.O. Box 218, Yorktown Heights, N.Y. 10598)
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**FACULTY AND/OR POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATE POSITIONS**

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It is anticipated that a small number of faculty and/or postdoctoral research associate positions will be available during the next 12 months in the Program in Technology and Human Affairs. This interdisciplinary, degree-granting program, based in the School of Engineering, is concerned with the application and assessment of technology in connection with contemporary problems. Preference for faculty positions will be given to persons with some background in engineering or applied science and with interests which fall within two broad categories, namely: (i) energy, resource, and environmental studies and/or (ii) communications, information, and educational technology studies. Ph.D. degree required. Send resume to: Prof. Robert Morgan, Chairman, Program in Technology and Human Affairs, Box 106, Washington University, St. Louis, Mo. 63130, Washington University. An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer

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Faculty Appointment. Salary and rank are negotiable. Qualifications: Ph.D. in Microbiology (Virology or Molecular Biology). Applicant must have had/may have experience to teach general and molecular virology to undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty member will be expected to organize and develop research programs. Ten-month appointment. To apply, send curriculum vitae, copies of reprints (if available), transcripts, and names of three references to: Dr. E. Osie, Head, Department of Microbiology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado 80523 before 1 November 1974. An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer

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**FELLOWSHIP**

Pharmacologist. Postdoctoral Fellowship now available for recent graduate with experience in neuropharmacology and interest in neurochemistry. Work will involve behavioral, neuropharmacological, and neurochemical studies on organically pure compounds with therapeutic potential. Other studies will involve brain histamine. Seek highly motivated individuals possessing the drive and ability to design experiments based on own initiatives. Send vitae and publications to: Dr. Michael C. Gerald, Division of Pharmacology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210. An equal opportunity employer

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**POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOWS IN PATHOLOGY OF MEMBRANES AND ORGANELLES**

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**POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP**

**Microbiology and/or Medicine Infectious Diseases.** Research Training Areas include molecular biology, immunology, epidemiology, and public health aspects of venereal diseases. Applications from women and/or minority members are encouraged. Send curriculum vitae and supporting information to: Dr. George F. Brooks, Department of Microbiology or Dr. George F. Brooks, Department of Medicine, Indiana University School of Medicine, Indianapolis, Indiana 46202.

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**POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP**

**Computer Image Processing and Pattern Recognition (application to biomedical problems).** Training and experience in programming, statistics, and video and digital systems are desirable. Send curriculum vitae to: Dr. P. N. Neumann, Department of Radiation, Tufts-New England Medical Center, 171 Harrison Avenue, Boston, Mass., 02111.

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**POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP IN DEVELOPMENTAL NEUROBIOLOGY.** Applications are invited from persons with Ph.D. or M.D. degree for research training in methods dealing with the prenatal development of the nervous system and behavior in animals. Multidisciplinary research is concerned with normative studies of neurodevelopmental and the effects of various experimental and environmental treatments on the maturation of brain and behavior. Send résumé and three letters of reference to: Dr. Robert Allman, Laboratory of Developmental Neurobiology, Department of Biomedical Sciences, Purdue University West Lafayette, Indiana 47907. An equal opportunity employer.

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**in Toxicology.** Applications are invited from individuals holding the Ph.D. or M.D. degree to participate in a multidisciplinary training program involving the geometric, structural, and functional properties of normal and abnormal mammalian cell membranes and intracellular organelles. Applicants with a background in immunology, immunogenetics, protein chemistry, carbohydrate chemistry, cell biology, electron microscopy, or tissue culture biology are welcome. Stipend $10,000 to $16,000 depending on experience. Send curriculum vitae and two letters of reference to: Dr. Ron Acton, Program Director, Postdoctoral Training Program, University of Alabama in Birmingham, University Station, Birmingham, Alabama 35294. An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer

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