

WHAT FAMILY PLANNING MEANS

Family-planning means the possibility for couples to plan the number of their children and to space out their births. It also means the ability to obtain the necessary information and proper knowledge about this subject.

In 1968 the International Human Rights Conference, held in Tehran and grouping more than 110 states, unanimously proclaimed the right of every couple to practice family planning.

Since then, the term has acquired wider connotations because it became involved with the process of ensuring the happiness of the family by effecting a balance between the number of its members and the means which ensure for them a respectable standard of living. In this sense, family planning is a basic factor in creating a healthy, educated and adequately cultured generation.

Family-planning is also an important factor in protecting the mother's and the child's health from the harm caused by frequent pregnancies.

Besides the guidance that family planning can provide concerning the number and spacing of children, it can also be a source of help to childless couples by giving them proper information concerning the causes and treatment of sterility.

Because of its close relationship with demographic conditions within the general scheme of social, cultural and economic resources in each country, family-planning has lately been acquiring a growing importance in both developed and developing countries. The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), who has offices in London and New York, comprises 81 states with a family-planning association in each.

ANOTHER DEVELOPMENT IN HEALTH ⁽¹⁾

A seminar on "Another Development in Health," organized in June 1977 at the Dag Hammarskjold Center at Uppsala, Sweden, declared that the crisis in health care "is not limited to the Third World but is becoming increasingly evident in the industrialized countries as well." It was made clear that development based on economic growth is not a guarantee of general health and welfare unless it is man-centered and works to improve the quality of life that man is leading.

A new definition of health was proposed: "It is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely absence of disease and illness."⁽²⁾

New needs for development in health were expounded by the seminar participants, representing mainly those of the Third World but also including those of industrialized countries.

The following are some of the important remarks and problems discussed by the seminar group:

1. Health-planners, who have been propounding the post-war model of the Western health-service delivery systems in the Third World countries, have disregarded the fundamentally different cultural, social, political, geographical and economic settings, as well as the different patterns of health and disease.
2. The maldistribution of health services which are concentrated in urban areas and wanting in rural ones.
3. The insufficient number of health-care workers, their recruitment, education and training which tend to alienate them from the people and prevent them from

gaining a proper understanding of their needs.

4. The health-cost explosion caused by high-technology care and the demand for accordingly specialized personnel.

It was agreed that modern medicine has failed to fulfil all that people expected from it. For example, the role of immunization and anti-biotics has not been as crucial as often thought. In short, **medicine can no longer be seen as one of the most fundamental causes of good health.** A change of emphasis and perspectives in health policies is needed, but this change needs careful consideration and planning which takes the socio-cultural factors into account.

Recommendations & Conclusions

The idea of involving the community in health questions was emphasized. The people in general should be given the opportunity to express their needs and decide their health-care priorities.

"The people" means the entire population of a community, specifically the underprivileged and the underserved, whose rights have often been usurped by the class which controls political and economic power.

Improvement of health status is a part of the overall improvement in people's political, economic and social status. It is questionable whether vaccination on a malnourished population can have a significant effect.

Better knowledge of the community's health culture, health behavior, appropriate technologies, delivery systems and agencies will help in finding better alternative methods of health care.

Technology should be subservient to people's needs. The same may be said of training and professional attitudes which must undergo a change serving the same goal.

Better health in a country's population is an expression of social justice. It should be a permanently ongoing event in any society which has set the objective of realizing itself in progress.

(1) This article is based on material published in **Development Dialogue**, a journal of international development cooperation published by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, Uppsala, 1, 1978.

(2) Goran Starky, "Towards another Development in Health," **Development Dialogue** *ibid.* p.9. Cf the following definition: "Good health needs to be defined in terms of the harmonious development of the individual's personality," quoted by Etienne Berthet, in **World Health** magazine, May 1979, p. 23.