Bernardini-Zambrini, Diego A.
The Pan American Health Organization: New challenges, new roles, new responsibilities
Colombia Médica, vol. 44, núm. 1, enero-marzo, 2013, pp. 5-6
Universidad del Valle
Cali, Colombia

Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=28325629001
Editorial

The Pan American Health Organization: New challenges, new roles, new responsibilities

Diego A. Bernardini-Zambrini

Pan American Health Organization PAHO/WHO. Regional Office for the Americas, World Health Organization, Washington D.C.

PAHO is the oldest international public health agency. It was created in 1902 as a mandate from a regional group of countries. Besides currently serving as WHO’s Regional Office for the Americas it is the specialized health agency for the Organization of American States (OAS); thus it must render accountability at two levels. PAHO is intimately linked to the development of regional health in the Americas and, therefore, to societal development in the countries from which it is composed. A new Director has been elected this year, Dr. Carissa Etienne, who will guide the institution for at least the next five years.

Thus PAHO is experiencing a period of change, a period of great relevance for defining the architecture, operation and agenda of the organization. The new role of the organization will be formed from the definition of the political action agenda, generating broad consensus on regional and global levels, as well as the public record of the health priorities and actions of the institution. Transforming the needs, the desires into effective public policies and communicating effectively its achievements and aspirations, will not only increase its support but legitimize its technical authority. This can be distilled as capacity for leadership.

One of the short-term debates about the role of this senior public health organization is how it will materialize a universal model of health based on equality in a region of high inequality. This is undoubtedly the greatest challenge. In an era of social determinants of health, of social justice and equity, and of human rights, Universal Health Coverage is a step forward in meeting needs and thinking about those that will enable us to confront the challenges ahead. In a world of economic instability where south-south cooperation, which has shown itself to be a valid strategy,
must consider the countries of the region whose economies will be playing leading roles in the immediate future: Mexico and Brazil, and in the second tier, represented by economies such as Chile, Colombia and Peru, that will permit a greater degree of autonomy.

This should be accompanied by monitoring and evaluation that allows for quantifying how, where, and at what cost has the implementation of programs that compose technical health cooperation been accomplished. The implementation of commitments must be managed effectively.

Today, health has become a dimension of public consciousness that allows room for dialogue, for integration, and for making sense of solidarity, key elements that make for transparency and accountability of an organization like PAHO. As Schumpeter has stated, one must be innovative in the sense of an organizational change that results in quantitative and qualitative aspects, in a greater and better dynamics that permeate a large network of partners and accesses greater resources. In this way, the development of a vision and a clear long-term strategy, defined and appropriate to the current agenda, will mark the continuity and the role of the longest standing public health agency to date.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST:**
The views expressed in this manuscript are solely those of the author and do not in any way represent the opinion or position of the institution to which he belongs.