

Inaugural Conference and First General Assembly

29 - 30 June 2000 - Havana, Cuba

Final Report

Prepared by the Initial Secretariat, La Plata, Argentina

Chapter I: Introduction. The Origins of the International Society for Equity in Health (ISEqH).

The Inaugural Conference of ISEqH and the first General Assembly, which took place in Havana, Cuba, June 29-30, 2000, were both the culmination of a long process and hard work of a small group of dedicated people.

The idea of organizing an international scientific society oriented toward equity in health began in late 1995.

At that time, it was felt that increasing interest in and attention to health inequities in both political as well as scientific sectors made it opportune to organize an international effort to address the problems in a scientific manner, with the hope of further increasing international awareness of the potential and promise of concerned action toward improving the distribution of good health and toward minimizing the systematic disadvantage suffered by defined segments of the world community, both within as well as across countries.

A scientific society addressed at such a goal could play an important role in promoting and disseminating concepts and methodologies toward achieving equity in health.

In early 1996, the first draft constitution was defined and circulated to approximately 150 individuals who were thought to be interested in such a society. At the same time (in March 1996), the International Society for Equity in Health Inc. was presented and approved as a non-stock corporation by the State of Maryland, USA.

Since that time, encouraging responses have been received from individuals working in universities, government organizations, and non-governmental organizations and representing diverse disciplines and specialties including but not limited to bioethics, health economics, public health, epidemiology, social and political sciences, and quality of medical services.

In July 1996, Dr. Barbara Starfield from Johns Hopkins University, USA, and Dr. José María Paganini from La Plata National University, Argentina, gathered with a small group at Union Station in Washington, DC, and were designated as Interim President and Secretary, respectively, of the fledgling Society.

From 1996 to 1998, a small secretariat was organized without any external support, located in the "Interdisciplinary University Center for Health" (Centro INUS in Spanish) at the School of Medical Sciences, National University, La Plata, Argentina.

During this period, contacts with potentially interested individuals were expanded

and advantage was taken of many international forums of different types to further explore potential interest.

These contacts allowed the Interim President and Secretary to develop an e-mail list of approximately 350 potentially interested individuals.

In March 1998, a National Forum on Equity and Health was organized in Argentina with the participation of Dr. Starfield, Dr. Paganini, and many other experts in the subject.

This meeting was also the occasion for the formation of the first national society, namely the Argentinian Society for Equity in Health (Sociedad Argentina para la Equidad en Salud "SAES"). This Society was approved under Argentinian law as a not-for-profit scientific society with tax exempt status in June 1999. The SAES is located at the School of Medical Sciences, Centro INUS, National University, La Plata, Argentina.

The PAHO-WHO country office in Argentina also provided a valuable contribution to the SAES meeting that took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, 6-8 April.

At the same time, it was also decided to actively pursue support for a formal inaugural meeting of the Society. With such purpose, grant proposals were developed and presented to the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the March of Dimes Foundation.

As a result, grants totaling US\$109,950 were received.

At the same time, the PAHO/WHO Director, George Alleyne, decided to offer the technical support of the Health and Development Division. In this context, the Bireme Center, located in Sao Paulo, Brazil, supported the ISEqH Secretariat for the designing and development of the ISEqH Website.

Chapter II: The Preparatory Phase, August 1999 - June 2000.

In August 1999, an agreement was signed between the Interim President of ISEqH and the Argentinean Society for Equity in Health (SAES) with the purpose of designating SAES as the ISEqH Executive Secretariat to receive grants and to organize the Inaugural Conference and the First ISEqH Assembly.

After considering different alternatives and after receiving responses from a large number of individuals who had expressed interest in the Society and its inaugural meeting, as well as with support from the granting agencies, it was decided to hold the inaugural meeting in Havana Cuba on June 29-30, 2000.

During this year, the work of the Interim President, the Interim Secretary, and the Secretariat was totally devoted to making contacts and planning the meeting. Important technical support was received from the Cuban PAHO/WHO country office.

Five main lines of activities were undertaken:

1. the organization of the Scientific Conference, including specification of the agenda, solicitation and selection of papers and posters, preparation of documents, and

printing and air mailing materials from Argentina to Cuba.

2. the allocation of fellowships to allow interested people who would not otherwise have been able to attend because of financial constraints, to participate at the conference.
3. the organization of the first ISEqH General Assembly.
4. the organization of pre-conference activities.
5. the definition and execution of a Conference budget and financial analysis.

1. The organization of the Conference

Due to the fact that there was no local organizing committee and no operating tour agency designated in Cuba, the secretariat located in Argentina requested and obtained the support of the PAHO/WHO representative in Cuba working as a liaison agent with the local authorities and the representatives of La Pradera Hotel, which was chosen as the venue for the Conference.

Although these administrative arrangements were successful in achieving control over operating costs, the small secretariat was heavily burdened with resolving travel and hotel issues.

For the relatively large number of expected USA participants, the intervention of the tour operator Marazul, located in the USA, was recommended as the means of arranging legal, travel, and hotel accommodations.

An ISEqH logo was designed. Working definitions, the draft Bylaws and Constitution, and other information concerning the Inaugural Conference were prepared and introduced onto the web.

The list of potential ISEqH members increased up to approximately 1,200 with a total of 700 considered as active potential members. Individuals were considered "active" if they replied to at least one e-mail. An electronic data base was developed that allowed a permanent on-line relationship with all prospective participants.

E-mail contacts were maintained with all interested individuals including information about participation in all conference activities and hotel and travel arrangements. Those who were unable to attend took advantage of this type of communication to manifest their support for and commitment to the ISEqH initiative and their desire to be involved in future activities.

A call for abstracts was circulated by e-mail in December 1999, and a hard copy was distributed to selected institutions by personal contacts.

A two-day agenda for the conference was organized. (See [Table 1.](#))

a. Keynote speaker

After several consultations with informal advisors, this responsibility was offered to Dr. Sudhir Anand.

Sudhir Anand is Professor of Economics at Oxford University, and Fellow of St. Catherine's College, Oxford. He is also Adjunct Professor at the Harvard School of Public Health. At Harvard, he has been collaborating with colleagues on a research initiative that explores the theory and measurement of health equity. He is trained in mathematics and economics, with a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Oxford University. Dr. Anand's research interests include inequality, poverty, and nutrition in developing countries; human development; population ethics; and health economics. He has written widely on the theory and measurement of economic inequality. Recently, he has worked with Amartya Sen on various aspects of human development, including an analysis of intra- and inter-generational equity that attempts to link present and future concerns for security through the concept of "sustainable human development", and the construction of the UNDP's gender-related development index (GDI) and Human Poverty Index (HPI). He is also working in the area of health economics, writing on the health implications of economic policies and a critique of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs).

b. The organization of simultaneous sessions for scientific papers presentations and posters exhibitions

A total of 169 scientific abstracts were received. A small scientific committee was organized under the Presidency of Dr. Starfield with the purpose of selecting those abstracts most related to the Conference's main theme of equity in health.

Abstracts were classified into four categories: Policy, Pathways, Methods, and Special Populations. The following criteria were developed to rate them:

1. Relevance to Equity: 4 points
2. Quality of Method: 2 points
3. Clarity of Message: 2 points
4. Relevance to a Conference Theme: 2 points

The Scientific Committee selected a total score of 8 as the cut-off for acceptability for oral presentation.

The final selection identified a total of 72 abstracts for oral presentation and 60 for poster session. The oral presentations were distributed in three sets of four concurrent sessions in the morning and afternoon of the first day of the meeting and in the morning of the second day.

c. The organization of a writers' workshop and a forum session to analyze scientific papers

The writers' workshop was included as an agenda item as a result of a volunteer effort by Dr. John Hoey, editor of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, with the purpose of contributing to the development of good scientific practices reporting. (Dr. Anthony Zwi, of the journal *Social Science and Medicine*, had originally suggested this idea but was unable to attend the meeting on the chosen dates.)

The forum session was organized with the purpose of constructively discussing recently published papers on the subject of equity. A call for contributions resulted in two critiques which were presented and discussed in a designated session in the second afternoon of the meeting.

At the request of WHO, a working lunch session was organized on the first day to allow for the presentation of the very recently published WHO World Health Report. This first public presentation of the Report (except for press conferences) was given by Emmanuela Gakidou of WHO.

The second lunch session was devoted to the reading of "keynote vignettes". A total of eleven prestigious researchers were invited to contribute with their ideas and proposals to further research on equity in health and health systems.

d. The preparation of the documents

All documents for the Conference were prepared and sent by air to Cuba (total 250 copies each). These included booklets with abstracts, Constitution and Bylaws, Agendas, Keynote Vignettes, and a list of proposed names for the Executive Board, with their respective biosketches.

e. The allocation of fellowships

In order to facilitate the participation at the Conference of interested individuals from developing countries and following the specific intent of a part of the grant money that was received, a special fund was allocated to provide partial financial support.

In order to allocate such funds, the ISEqH Interim President and Secretariat developed and considered the following four different categories, ranked in order of priority.

1. Professionals from developing countries who submitted abstracts that were accepted for scientific sessions
2. Professionals from developing countries who presented abstracts for poster sessions
3. Professionals who were known to be active in working on equity issues in their developing countries
4. Professionals from developing countries who submitted a written statement explaining their interest in and commitment to work on equity in health.

In addition, money was allocated to postgraduate and graduate students who had expressed their interest in the field and offered to work in the organization of the Conference.

Following these criteria, 25 fellowships were allocated, most of them to individuals from developing countries. (See [Table 2.](#))

3. The organization of the first ISEqH General Assembly

As one of the objectives of the Conference was to finalize the organization of the ISEqH, the Conference agenda included the first ISEqH General Assembly.

A proposed Constitution and Bylaws were developed with volunteer advice from Barbara Holstein, a US lawyer.

An executive board member slate was proposed with the following names: Drs. Barbara Starfield (United States); José María Paganini (Argentina); Carme Borrell (Spain); Chee-Khoon Chan (Malaysia); Finn Diderichsen (Sweden); Jane Dixon (Australia); Philippa Howden-Chapman (New Zealand); Rene Loewenson (Zimbabwe); and Adam Oliver (United Kingdom).

4. The organization of pre-conference activities

With the agreement of the Cuban Ministry of Health and the coordination of the PAHO/WHO representative in Cuba, two days of pre-conference field activities were developed. On June 27, a visit to three policlinics of the Cuban health care services provided an orientation to the network of services oriented toward primary health care. On June 28, a visit to the International School of Medical Sciences was organized.

Chapter III: The Development of the Pre-Conference and Conference Activities

Most of the participants stayed at La Pradera Hotel; those who could not be accommodated due to overflow were accommodated at the Palco Hotel nearby, with van transportation. An atmosphere of friendship and camaraderie was perceived from the beginning of the activities and throughout the meeting.

A total of 206 participants representing 31 countries were present, representing prestigious institutions and international organizations. (See [Table 3.](#))

A total of 62 scientific papers and 32 posters were presented.

The pre-conference and conference activities involved the participation of Dr. Abelardo Ramirez, Vice Minister of Health in charge of the Ministry; Patricio Yepes, PAHO/WHO representative; and also Drs. Starfield and Paganini.

On the first day of the Inaugural Conference (June 29), Dr. Paganini presented briefly the history of ISEqH and expressed special thanks to the Johns Hopkins University and to La Plata National University for their support as well as to all the participants.

Dr. Barbara Starfield then offered special thanks to PAHO-WHO and to the rest of the granting institutions (the Rockefeller Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the March of Dimes Foundation), and gave a brief presentation of the research challenge related to achieving equity in health.

Chapter IV

A. ISEqH General Assembly

On June 30 at 9:00 a.m. under Dr. Barbara Starfield, President, and Dr. José M. Paganini, Secretary, with the advice of B. Hollstein, the participants gathered in a General Assembly to decide about the future of ISEqH.

The Assembly started with a brief presentation by Drs. Paganini and Starfield about the past activities, purposes and objectives of the ISEqH.

Following steps recommended by the lawyer acting as Parliamentarian, the Assembly unanimously approved the draft Constitution and Bylaws, with a few minor amendments.

Thereafter, the Assembly approved the [Executive Board](#) members slate, as follows, for the period 2000-2002. **President:** Barbara Starfield (United States); **Secretary-Treasurer:** José María Paganini (Argentina); **Executive Board:** Carme Borrell (Spain), Chee-Khoo Chan (Malaysia), Finn Diderichsen (Sweden), Jane Dixon (Australia), Phillippa Howden-Chapman (New Zealand), Rene Loewenson (Zimbabwe), and Adam Oliver (United Kingdom).

Next the names of the [Scientific Advisory Council](#) were presented by Dr. Starfield. These included George Alleyne (PAHO DC), Celia Almeida (Brazil), Sudhir Anand (USA), Edgar Barillas (Guatemala), Paula Braveman (USA), Juan Antonio Casas (PAHO DC), Tung-Liang Chiang (Taiwan), Tim Evans (USA), Lucy Gilson (South Africa), Andrew Gunn (Australia), Michael Katz (USA), Nancy Krieger (USA), Althea LaFoucade (Trinidad and Tobago), Johan Mackenbach (Netherlands), P. K. B. Nayar (India), Jorge Ochoa (Argentina), Alvin Tarlov (USA), Henrie M. Treadwell (USA), Michael Wolfson (Canada), and Beatriz Zurita (Mexico).

Dr. Jorge Ochoa from the Argentinian Society of Physicians (COMRA) offered financial and technical support for the ISEqH Secretariat, to be located in Argentina for the period 2000-2002.

At the end of the Assembly, participants were requested to make comments and express their interest in participating in committees. As a result of this survey, eight committees were constituted, and four more were proposed by the participants. (See [Table 4.](#))

B. The First Executive Board Meeting

From 19:00 p.m. to 21:30 p.m. on June 30, the first ISEqH Executive Board meeting was held. At that time, Dr. Barbara Starfield was elected as President and Dr. José María Paganini as Secretary Treasurer for the 2000-2002 period.

Dr. Paganini and Lic. Ricardo Burry, representing SAES, presented and explained the draft budget and an estimation of ISEqH's financial status. It was decided that after all the information is received, the final budget analysis will be distributed to all Executive Board Members.

The location for the next meeting was also discussed, and proposals from Canada and India were received. It was agreed that the final decision will be made and members and other interested people notified at the end of the year 2000.

The agreement with Elsevier Sciences Ireland Ltd. was presented and approved. This agreement allows ISEqH members a discount price for all regular issues of *Health Policy* (9 issues in the year 2000) and each of its supplements. This agreement will also allow dissemination of ISEqH news and activities in *Health Policy*.

The ISEqH membership fee was discussed, and it was agreed that a final proposal will be developed to be approved for the year 2001. Until that time, a founding membership fee of US \$100 will prevail.

Finally, it was decided that the ISEqH secretariat will be maintained until the year 2002 in La Plata, Argentina, in accordance with the ISEqH/SAES agreement.

Chapter V: Financial Analysis (See [Table 5.](#))

ISEqH was granted the total amount of US\$109,950 from the following five institutions: PAHO-WHO, Rockefeller Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, Ford Foundation, and March of Dimes Foundation.

Conference registration and membership fees amounted to US\$36,330.

The total expenditures represent US\$107,372 divided into two phases: preparatory phase (US\$26,644), conference and post-conference activities (US\$80,728).

Thus, the estimated budget of the Society of US\$38,908 is allocated for the technical and administrative support of the Society for the next 12 months.

Other financial contributions and fund-raising activities need to be implemented in order to facilitate the future activities of the Society.

Some of these are still in process, like the expected contribution of the Argentinian Medical Confederation reported at the General Assembly in Havana.

José María Paganini
President, SAES

Ricardo Burry
Treasurer, SAES

Table 5: Financial Analysis

INCOME	US\$
Grant, W. K. Kellogg Foundation	25,000
Grant, March of Dimes	10,000
Grant, PAHO	24,950
Grant, Rockefeller Foundation	25,000
Grant, Ford Foundation	25,000
Subtotal	109,950
Conference fees	19,650
Field trip fees	2,550
ISEqH membership fees	14,000
Financial investment interest	130
Subtotal	36,330

TOTAL INCOME	146,280
EXPENSES	US\$
Preparatory phase (September 1999 - June 2000)	
Secretariat	14,948
Functioning expenses	11,696
Subtotal	26,644
Conference and post-conference activities (June - September 2000)	
Documents	13,679
Fellowships	42,193
Organization expenses	22,291
Field trip	2,265
Other expenses	300
Subtotal	80,728
TOTAL EXPENSES	107,372
FINANCIAL BALANCE	38,908

Chapter VI: Conclusions and Next Steps

The purpose of this final chapter is to provide an evaluation of the achievements of the Inaugural Conference.

The presence at the Conference in Cuba of more than 200 researchers from 31 countries of diverse social and economic development, and the development of an active list of more than 500 interested individuals is strong evidence of the accomplishment of one of ISEqH's main purposes.

The participation of scientific groups representing several prestigious institutions was another important step toward the development of an institutional network for equity in health.

This effort was consolidated at the first ISEqH General Assembly with the approval of the Constitution and Bylaws and the Executive Board.

The publication of selected papers and further development of the ISEqH website will also facilitate the dissemination of important scientific material.

The definition of eight scientific committees will support further development of ISEqH purposes and facilitate contributions of all ISEqH members.

A program of work is now in process of development for the period 2000-2002.

Barbara Starfield
President, ISEqH

José María Paganini
Secretary Treasurer, ISEqH