

Highlights of CHRC's Work in 2012

During 2012, the Caribbean Health Research Council (CHRC) focussed on its transition into the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) while ensuring that it continued to provide services to its member countries and other stakeholders. It was therefore able to successfully complete the gamut of activities consistent with its mandate to facilitate the production, dissemination and uptake of research and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) findings to guide evidence-based practice, programmes and policy in the Caribbean. Indeed, its staff assiduously continued to discharge their duties, at the highest standard, in support of this mandate.

The following is a summary of the work conducted by CHRC in 2012:

Capacity Development

- Training Workshops: The Caribbean Health Research Council hosted 11 training workshops in 2012: Basic Monitoring and Evaluation (5), Basic Research Skills (2), Advanced Monitoring and Evaluation (2), Data Management and Analysis (1) and Grant Proposal Writing (1). Over 200 Caribbean health professionals were trained from 17 countries. Participants were primarily staff of Ministries of Health and other Government ministries and programmes, universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- Effectiveness of Training: The Caribbean Health Research Council conducted a comprehensive evaluation of its M&E training workshops utilizing an online quantitative survey as well as in-depth interviews of workshop participants. Workshop content and organization received high scores. In addition, there was a significant increase in knowledge after the training. However, there was moderate application of the knowledge gained. The need for technical support for participants to implement learning on return to their workplaces was highlighted.
- Training Manuals: The Caribbean Health Research Council published a standardized training manual for use in the conduct of Advanced Monitoring and Evaluation workshops in the Caribbean. This manual is the sequel to the highly

regarded Basic M&E Manual which was published in 2011. The content of this specialized (Advanced) Manual builds on the fundamental M&E concepts that were introduced in the Basic workshop but with a sharp focus on developing capacity to conduct health programme evaluations. The Manual is available online and a limited number of hard copies are available on request.

Technical Support

Technical support was provided in the areas of health research and M&E. Using project funding, CHRC employed two M&E Specialists and two M&E Officers at various times during 2012. However, there was a single Junior Research Scientist due to funding constraints.

- Support was provided in the area of M&E to health professionals to build/strengthen M&E systems in nine member countries during 2012.
- Support was also provided in the development of research protocols, analysis of data and preparation of manuscripts/reports to researchers and health professionals in four countries.

Annual Research Conference

The Caribbean Health Research Council's 57th Annual Scientific Meeting was co-hosted by the Ministry of Health, Cayman Islands on April 19–21, 2012.

- Over 160 delegates from 16 countries attended the Conference.
- More than 100 oral and poster presentations and feature lectures were presented and discussed.
- Dr Samuel Rawlins, an exceptional researcher and Nobel Prize Laureate, was honoured for *Outstanding Contribution to Public Health Research in the Caribbean* at the Awards Banquet.
- The "David Picou Best Young Researcher Prize" was won by Ms S McFarlane and the "Student Prize" was won by Dr C Richardson.

Health Research Agenda

In addition to promoting and disseminating the Caribbean Health Research Agenda at meetings and workshops in order to encourage its adoption by stakeholders, CHRC

utilized its Research Grants Programme to facilitate the conduct of research identified in the Agenda. Indeed, only topics indicated in the Agenda qualified for funding by CHRC in 2012.

Clinical Guidelines to Support Evidence-based Practice

The Caribbean Health Research Council continued the promotion of its clinical guidelines for the Region's most common health challenges in order to facilitate the evidenced-based management of patients. Protocols for the management of diabetes, hypertension, asthma and depression were developed and revised over the last few years. New guidelines for maternal care in pregnancy are being developed and the draft was reviewed and revised in 2012 and are to be finalized and published in 2013.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In addition to the M&E activities related to the capacity development and technical support, CHRC conducted specific projects during 2012. These included:

- State of M&E Practice in the Caribbean: The Caribbean Health Research Council identified Jamaica as a model for good practice in M&E for the Caribbean. The report on the State of M&E Practice outlined lessons learned based on Jamaica's experience in developing M&E Plans for its National HIV Programme. It also detailed the Jamaican approach to M&E Planning, a model for countries in the Region as they seek to develop functional M&E systems.
- Evaluation of National Strategic Plans: The Caribbean Health Research Council was committed to developing country capacity to conduct evaluations in order to assess progress toward achieving stated programme outcomes and generating practical recommendations. This guided its conduct of mid- and end-of term national strategic plan evaluations in Belize, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname. A key feature of these evaluations was the 'learn by doing' approach which involved the CHRC M&E staff working closely with country professionals. The skills and experience of M&E professionals from fellow Caribbean countries were also utilized in the con-

duct of these evaluations. This approach along with the evaluation results were well received by Ministry of Health officials in each of the countries.

Promotion of Health Research and M&E

In 2012:

- CHRC continued to advise Caribbean governments and other agencies on health research and M&E matters. Activities included its contributions to a number of facilities of the CARICOM Secretariat such as the Caucus of Ministers Responsible for Health, Meeting of the Chief Medical Officers, Council of the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) and various committees of the Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP).
- CHRC also represented Caribbean interests at international fora such as on the Board of the Council on Health Research for Development (COHRED) and PAHO's Advisory Committee on Health Research.

Research Grants Programme

The CHRC Research Grants Programme had always played an important role in supporting the research efforts of junior researchers. In 2012, there was a marked improvement in the quality of proposals submitted to CHRC and a total of 10 research grants were approved and funded. The sum disbursed for these grants was US\$92 700, representing a 168 per cent increase over 2011.

CHRC Newsletter

Four issues of the quarterly Newsletter, *CHRC News* were published in 2012. Stakeholders looked forward to *CHRC News* in order to be updated on the work of the CHRC and other health research and M&E developments. It also played a key role in disseminating research findings that have implications for health policy and practice.

Donald T Simeon, PhD
Deputy Director
Caribbean Public Health Agency
(Director of CHRC, 2002–2012)