

The matter of international collaboration in the field of medical lexicography is the subject of a recent issue of the *News Bulletin* of the CIOMS (Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences). The problem is, to quote, the chaotic state of medical terminology, which has become an obstacle to the communication of ideas and the progress of research. Tens of thousands of synonyms are in fairly widespread use; for example, there are 37 for aleukemic leukemia, and 172 for *Candida albicans*. Consequently, it is often very difficult if not impossible to find out the concepts represented by words used; medical translations are full of errors; and medical terminology is deteriorating in all the widely-used languages.

Several organizations are listed, including CIOMS itself, that have been active in the field of scientific terminology, with success in some instances and with progress in others. On the other hand, some societies have set up special committees which would meet during an international congress and then, at the next congress some years later, it would be found that little progress had been made, because of lack of funds or lack of a dedicated man, or because of endless discussion over the definitions of a few particularly controversial terms.

The present situation is regarded as unsatisfactory because (a) far too many organizations have remained indifferent to the problem, although only international organizations will be able to gain agree-

ment on controversial terminologic questions; or (b) work has been carried out by individuals, according to differing principles and criteria; or (c) results have appeared only in specialized journals, and remain virtually unknown to the general medical and scientific public. Reference should be made to the original publication for answer to the questions what could be done, and how.¹

It may be suggested that, although the field is relatively small, the International Leprosy Association might well take action in this matter. There is not a little confusion in the terminology used in leprosy, and not infrequently it is impossible to tell precisely what condition a writer is describing. A limited attempt to set up a glossary (some of it not acceptable now), was made by the Leonard Wood Memorial Round Table held in Manila in 1931, but the subsequent international congresses on leprosy have avoided the matter.

It would probably be well to adopt the recommendations of CIOMS that the first phase of the operation, i.e., the drawing up of a list of terms to be defined should be entrusted to two or three qualified (and dedicated) persons rather than to a large committee. This move might be initiated at once through executive action by means of a postal referendum of the Council, without waiting until the next congress to which the matter would be submitted for further action.

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¹CIOMS *News Bulletin* No. 23, July 1964, obtainable without charge from the CIOMS, 6 Rue Franklin, Paris 16, France.