An Overview

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has entered 93rd year in the service of nation. The Council continues to direct its resources in conducting research towards finding feasible solutions to problems being encountered in addressing India's health problems.

The Memorandum for the Expenditure Finance Committee for utilizing the funds received from Departments of Health and that of Family Welfare have been approved. The research activities outlined in the 10th plan document could now be pursued with greater vigour. This was not possible up to now as the ICMR's annual allocations in the first two years of the 10th plan were almost equal to the last year of 9th Plan. It is expected that in the remaining part of the 10th plan this shortfall would be compensated with an adequate increase in the allocations.

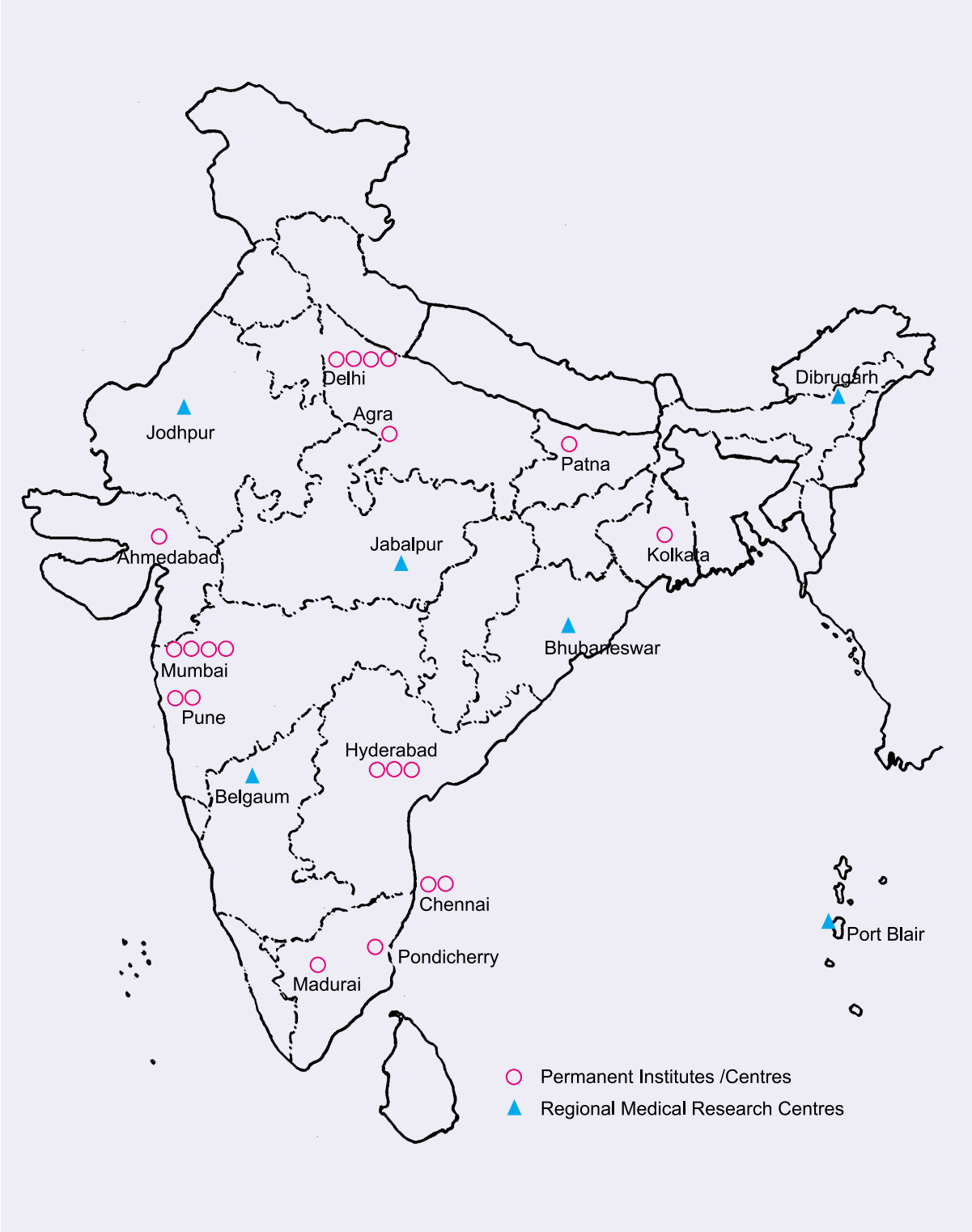
The Council has stepped-up its funding for the extramural research programme for which close to 25% of the budget is being earmarked. As part of its Extramural Research Programme, the Council supported over 1000 projects during the year 2003-04. Laboratory studies constituted about 40%, clinical studies 30%, epidemiological and operational studies 20%. Of Rs. 34 crores being spent in this programme, laboratory, clinical, epidemiological and operational studies constituted about 30% each. A large share of funding (46%) went to research institutions, about 30% to medical colleges and 13% to universities. As part of this programme, large number of scientific (350), technical (500) and supporting staff (60) were trained.

Having improved the infrastructure in the Institutes/Centres in previous years, the focus this year has been on a larger allocation for supplies and consumables so that the equipments could be put to optimal use. The Council is spending a quarter of its budget on pay and allowances. It has not been possible to shift some of the expenditure being made under "Plan" to "Non-Plan" due to the static Non-Plan outlay. With the improvement in infrastructure for conducting research in the Institutes, it has been possible for them to attract larger number of Ph.D. students as compared to earlier years. The Council continues to support human resources development through its training courses (regular as well as short term) in various institutes.

Playing its stewardship role as a health research organization, the Council has used the Global Forum for Health Research (GFHR) Combined Approach Matrix for setting research priorities in various disciplines. The estimation of disease burden using Murray and Lopez method for some infectious and non-infectious diseases was pursued. Due to variation in the completeness and quality of data available on disease incidence and prevalence coupled with statistics obtained from the programme and research studies with the problems associated in assigning disability and age weights, alternative strategies to estimate disease burden are being thought of. Application of methods developed by Centre for Economic Policy Research for tracking financial flows for health research in India indicated that the existing system of keeping accounts did not permit disaggregation of expenditure on health research. Thus differentiation of the spend on service sector from research at tertiary level health care facilities can not be done.

NEW AND EMERGING INFECTIONS

The ICMR is playing an important role to detect new and emerging infections in India like the Chandipura virus encephalitis in Andhra Pradesh and parts of Gujarat. Investigations carried out with the help of CDC, Atlanta, USA have indicated a strong possibility of the Siliguri Outbreak of mysterious fever of 2002 to be due



ICMR INSTITUTIONAL NETWORK

to Nipah virus. In its attempt to step-up research on these pathogens, the Microbial Containment Complex, Pune has been completed and is now ready for commissioning. It is a state of the art laboratory to assist the scientists of ICMR and other agencies in conducting research on exotic and dangerous pathogens. Microbial Repositories of malaria and leishmaniasis parasites, Mycobacteria, HIV and other viruses and *V.cholerae* were strengthened and catalogues of strains available in some of these registries have been prepared.

REPRODUCTIVE AND MATERNAL HEALTH

Nisin, a food preservative has been demonstrated to also have antifertility activity for the first time. A reproductive health programme for adolescents has been initiated besides home based management of young infants in five states of the country.

PUBLICATIONS

The Indian Journal of Medical Research – the ICMR's flagship medical journal has now a contemporary new look. The Medicinal Plants Unit has brought out the first volume of the quality standards of Indian medicinal plants as well as the first three volumes on Indian Medicinal Plants.

RESEARCH PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

An important indicator of performance of any research organization is the quality and quantity of publications including the impact factors of its research publications. During 2003, a total of 417 research papers were published of which 268 were in SCI/JCR journals. The average impact factor per paper improved to 2.180 from 2.030 of 2002.

ICMR @ JCCC

In order to improve the access of scientific journals to various institutes of the ICMR a J-Gate Custom Content for Consortia – JCCC (*http://www.jccc-icmr.informindia.co.in*) has been set up to provide access to over 500 journals subscribed currently by the ICMR's network of Institutes/Centres. It provides on-line access to more than 200 free biomedical journals and also nearly 12000 e-journals covered under J-Gate. The ICMR has subscribed to JCCC for all laboratories with the aim of sharing resources of journals available in ICMR institutes.

COLLABORATIONS

An Inter Agency Collaboration for development of herbal medicine has been set up

between the Department of ISM/Ayush, CSIR and the ICMR – popularly known as the 'Golden Triangle'. The JICA-NICED collaboration has entered into Phase-II and a grant-in-aid totalling about Rs. 90 crores has been approved. This would further strengthen the collaboration in improving techniques and molecular biology research. Another example for the international collaboration is the progress made in setting up of a National Centre for Primate Breeding and Research at Sasunavgher, Maharashtra. This Centre would function as a base for research, biological testing breeding of primates and human resources development.