Overview of ICMR

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), New Delhi, the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination and promotion of biomedical research, is one of the oldest medical research bodies in the world (more than hundred years in the service of bio-medical research).

As early as in 1911, the Government of India set up the Indian Research Fund Association (IRFA) with the specific objective of sponsoring and coordinating medical research in the country. After independence, several important changes were made in the organization and the activities of the IRFA. It was re-designated in 1949 as the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) with considerably expanded scope of functions.

The ICMR is funded by the Department of Health Research (DHR), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India. It promotes research in all areas of medical and related science with an aim of improving the health and quality of life of the Indian public. The Council has broadened its activities from a pure biomedical research organization to one that also undertakes health systems research. It's mandate covers the entire spectrum of research from biological to social, laboratory to field, and from idea to use. The Council commits itself to take its research agenda forward, and strives to get research results translated into efficient disease control and prevention strategies.

The Council's research priorities coincide with the national health priorities such as control and management of communicable diseases, fertility control, maternal and child health, control of nutritional disorders, developing alternative strategies for health care delivery, containment within safety limits of environmental and occupational health problems, research on major non-communicable diseases like cancer, cardiovascular diseases, blindness, diabetes and other metabolic and haematological disorders, mental health research and drug research (including traditional remedies). All these efforts are undertaken with a view to reduce the total burden of disease and to promote health and well-being of the population.

In the context of the changing public health scene, the balancing of research efforts between different competing fields, especially when resources are severely limited, is a typical problem encountered in the management of medical research, particularly in developing countries. Infectious diseases and excessive population growth have continued to constitute the major priorities to be addressed in medical research throughout the past several decades. In addition to tackling these issues, in recent years, research has been intensified progressively on emerging health problems such as cardiovascular diseases, metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus), mental health problems, neurological disorders, blindness, liver diseases, hearing impairment, cancer, drug abuse, accidents, disabilities *etc.* Research on traditional medicine/herbal remedies was revived with a disease-oriented approach. Attempts have been made to strengthen and streamline medical informatics and communication to meet the growing demands and needs of the biomedical community. The Council is alert to new diseases and new dimensions of existing diseases, as exemplified by the rapid

organization of a network of Surveillance Centres for AIDS in different states of India in 1986.

The Governing Council of ICMR is presided over by the Union Minister for Health & Family Welfare, GoI. It is assisted in scientific and technical matters by a Scientific Advisory Board comprising of eminent experts in different biomedical disciplines. The Board, in its turn, is assisted by a series of Scientific Advisory Groups, Scientific Advisory Committees, Expert Groups, Task Forces and Steering Committees etc. which evaluate and monitor different research activities of the Council.

The ICMR promotes biomedical research in the country through intramural as well as extramural research.

1. Intramural research is carried out currently through the Council's 32 Research Institutes/ Centres/Units. These include:
   a) 21 mission-oriented national institutes located in different parts of India that address the research on specific areas such as tuberculosis, leprosy, cholera and diarrhoeal diseases, viral diseases including AIDS, malaria, kala-azar, vector control, nutrition, reproduction, immunohaematology, oncology, medical statistics, *etc;*
   b) 6 Regional Medical Research Centres that address regional health problems, and also aim to strengthen or generate research capabilities in different geographic areas of the country; and
   c) 5 Units/Centres dealing with food & drug toxicology, viral diseases, handling microorganisms of highly infectious nature, prenatal diagnosis for neonatal retardation *etc* and supply of various animal models and feeds for experimental purposes.
2. Over the decades, the base of extramural research and also its strategies have been expanded by the Council. Extramural research is promoted by ICMR through:
   a) Setting up of Centres for Advanced Research in different research areas around existing expertise and infrastructure in selected departments of Medical Colleges, Universities and other non-ICMR Research Institutes.
   b) Task force studies which emphasize a time-bound, goal-oriented approach with clearly defined targets, specific time frames, tbl-standardized and uniform methodologies, and often a multi-centric structure.
   c) Open-ended research on the basis of applications for grants-in-aid received from scientists in non-ICMR Research Institutes, Medical colleges, Universities *etc*. located in different parts of the country.
3. In addition to research activities, the ICMR encourages human resource development in biomedical research through:
   a) Research Fellowships
   b) Short-Term Visiting Fellowships
   c) Short-Term Research Studentships
   d) Various Training Programmes and Workshops conducted by ICMR Institutes and Headquarters

4. For retired medical scientists and teachers, the Council offers the position of Emeritus Scientist to enable them to continue or take up research on specific biomedical topics. The Council also awards prizes to Indian scientists, in recognition of significant contributions to biomedical research. At present, the Council offers 38 awards, of which 11 are meant exclusively for young scientists (below 40 years).

Source: ICMR website