

INVESTMENTS IN HEALTH RESEARCH: TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN BRAZIL

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An increasing amount of resources is needed for Science & Technology (S&T) to be able to actually contribute to economic and social development in Brazil. The federal government has established a clear policy in this sense. The Budget Law has reserved resources from Sectoral Funds to promote investments in priority areas through calls for projects. In the same line, resources for research are gradually increasing, in accordance with a cooperation policy between the federal and state governments. Although this perspective is stimulating, it is not enough. There is a need for greater investments in S&T budgets, involving central, state and municipal governments and partnerships with the productive sector.

On a global scale, the health area is considered to be one of the sectors with the highest research spending. Estimates for Brazil indicated that, in 2001, R\$ 500 million were spent on research in the public sector, with an annual per capita investment of R\$ 27,907 in health researchers. On that occasion, this amount was considered insufficient to attend needs, in view of the large number of problems that result from the crisis faced by most university and teaching hospitals⁽¹⁾.

In 2004/2005, approximately R\$ 130 million was applied to health research projects and this amount is expected to increase by 10% for 2006⁽²⁾. In view of the fact that, nowadays, the crisis does not only affect university hospitals, but the entire health sector, the research budget seems to be insufficient and can put up barriers to the advancement of scientific knowledge in health, in the orientation of technological development and industrial innovation vectors in terms of equipment, medication, immunization agents and other basic health inputs.

One strategy used by the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Science & Technology, which has been offering new perspectives to the scientific community is the establishment of health research priorities, with a view to improving services and actions carried out in the Single Health System and, consequently, the population's health levels⁽³⁾.

In March, the Science and Technology Department of the Ministry of Health (DECIT/MS) held a Workshop on health research priorities to elaborate the terms of reference for launching the calls for thematic research projects for 2006. The discussion and contracting of these calls is accomplished jointly by the DECIT/MS, the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and the Studies and Projects Funding Body (Finep), aimed at attending to the health needs expressed in the National Health Policy⁽⁴⁾. The list of priorities and their respective sub-agendas has not been published yet, but we know that they will be directed at the following areas: communication and information in health, work management, education management, evaluation of health technologies, diagnostic kits, clinical genetics, health and environment, health of the black population, health of disabled persons, population ageing and health of the elderly, health of the male population, social determinants, neglected diseases and bio-drugs, as disseminated by the Virtual Health Library⁽³⁾.

There is no doubt whatsoever that governments and society need to acknowledge that S&T investments need to be equaled to other infrastructural programs, to be able to expand the country's competitiveness in all regions. Moreover, interlocution among governments to construct a Latin-American cooperation agenda in S&T would be advisable. This would entail precious gains, especially for nursing, in the sense of leveraging research development and knowledge transfer to education and service, besides nursing integration in Latin America.

Therefore, nursing leaders need to adopt a proactive attitude, paying attention to opportunities, creating spaces and mechanisms for inserting this knowledge area and presenting demands through projects that are in line with public policies.

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