

The Centre for medical science and history : an introduction, May 1991.

Contributors

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**THE CENTRE
FOR
MEDICAL SCIENCE
AND HISTORY**



An introduction

May 1991

Supported solely by The Wellcome Trust

INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Medical Science and History represents a major new initiative on the part of the Wellcome Trust aimed at stimulating public interest in the biomedical sciences and the history of medicine.

The Centre will be located in the Wellcome Building, 183 Euston Road, London NW1, together with the offices of the Wellcome Trust and the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine. The Centre, which is due to open to the public in Spring 1992, will offer a wide range of facilities including:

- ★ A permanent exhibition on modern medical science entitled **Science for Life**
- ★ Information Service
- ★ Scientific Meetings Programme
- ★ Tropical Diseases Interactive Videodisc
- ★ Iconographic Collections Videodisc
- ★ History of Medicine exhibitions
- ★ Photographic Service

Although funded and operated by the Wellcome Trust, the Centre is intended to serve the needs of the biomedical and veterinary research community as a whole. It is hoped that the various activities of the Centre will contribute to a greater public understanding of the processes of biomedical research and highlight its significance in everyday life.

The Director of the Centre is Dr L. H. Smaje and further information can be obtained from the Centre Manager, Mr S. E. Emberton, at The Wellcome Trust, The Centre for Medical Science and History, 179 Great Portland Street, London WIN 5TB (Tel. 071-436 4226 Fax. 071-436 2851).

SCIENCE FOR LIFE

An exhibition about medical research

In the Western world we take good health for granted — we plan our lives confident in the belief that our children will survive, and that we ourselves will live to see them raise families of their own. Such faith in the future is very new — and owes much to the revolution in medical science that has taken place over the last hundred years. Yet, while the quality of our lives depends so much on medical advance, few of us understand the nature of the research effort that lies at its heart.

The new permanent exhibition **Science for Life** aims to bridge the gap between the researchers who work to push our understanding forward, and the public they serve. The exhibition has been designed primarily for a non-scientific audience — those whose work brings them into close contact with medicine, those who may influence the funding of research, those contemplating a career in medicine, and those who are in some way actively engaged in current medical debates. A rich variety of exhibits allows visitors to discover something about themselves as biological beings, and to explore the many dimensions of medical science which affect their lives.

Always lively, and easily accessible to the non-scientist, **Science for Life** is designed to excite curiosity and provoke thought in the hope that visitors will leave with a greater interest in medical research and a deeper insight into its nature.

INFORMATION SERVICE

The **Information Centre** will provide a resource of material on biomedical research, with particular emphasis on assisting those concerned with the organisation and management of research. Additionally the **Information Centre** will provide interested members of the public with background information on medical research, supporting the public awareness role of the **Science for Life** exhibition.

The subject areas covered will include biomedical research policy, funding, management, organisation and manpower, together with non-technical treatments of current developments and career opportunities in research.

Visitors will be able to access the full range of information resources including the reference collection, in-house databases, databases on compact disc, videotapes and the Tropical Diseases and Iconographic Collections videodiscs.

An enquiry service will be provided by experienced information specialists and will also be available via the telephone, mail, fax and electronic mail.

Two databases on research grants and vacancies are being developed by the staff of the Information Service in order to improve awareness within the biomedical research community to potential sources of funding and career opportunities. The databases will be available at the **Information Centre** and via the national Joint Academic Network of computers (JANET).

SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS PROGRAMME

The main aims of the meetings programme are to aid communication between scientists and to help develop innovative thinking. Further aims are to help communication between scientists and the community at large and to bring the history of medicine to a wider audience.

First class facilities for meetings, symposia and workshops for up to about 170 will be available and the following types of meeting are envisaged:

Medical Science. Meetings of Trust-funded scientists will continue to constitute an important feature of our programme. In addition, meetings with international participation are planned for review and consolidation of current active areas of research, for developing new fields in the biomedical sciences and, it is hoped, for helping resolve important scientific controversies.

History of Medicine. The successful programme of public symposia and seminars of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine will continue in the new facilities.

Regular meetings will also be held in the areas of **Research Policy** and **Research Management** and in the **Public Understanding of Science**. Medical Charities and Scientific Societies are also invited to apply for the use of the facilities.

THE TROPICAL DISEASES VIDEODISC PROJECT

The Wellcome Trust **Tropical Diseases Videodisc Project** is a three year project initiated in 1990 with the aim of placing the contents of the Wellcome Museum of Medical Science in an enhanced and updated form on to computer and videodisc. By combining the skills of computer programmers, video technologists, university teachers and clinicians, the intention is to produce one of the most sophisticated medical teaching archives in the world. The **Tropical Diseases Videodisc** will be a transportable visual teaching archive that will be made widely available throughout the global medical community. In this way the educational opportunities and support available to all those involved in fighting tropical disease in the developing world can be significantly improved.

Users of the **Tropical Diseases Videodisc** will be able to browse through the archive by disease, presenting sign or country, and in other ways if experience suggests that they would be useful. By means of easily interpreted screen images, users will be able to access data as required. The electronic museum currently being developed will incorporate modern computer-assisted learning (CAL) techniques, making it fully interactive. CAL technology will be used as appropriate to complement and extend the range and effectiveness of conventional methods of teaching.

ICONOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS VIDEODISC

The Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine's Iconographic Collections form Europe's most important general source of pictures of historical medical subjects, including biomedical sciences, medical and surgical practice, and those intellectual, social and cultural forces which have left their mark on the development of medicine over the centuries. An interactive **videodisc** database system is being prepared which will be able to retrieve and display any one of some 50,000 pictures. Using the Library's computer system, users will be able to home in on specific subjects, navigate through broader areas, or if they wish, browse the entire disc, scanning medical themes and personalities from antiquity to the twentieth century. In addition to the benefits which it will offer to users, the high-quality colour images presented by the **videodisc** will relieve the intense pressure of demand currently placed on the delicate originals by historical researchers, the medical world and the media.

HISTORY OF MEDICINE EXHIBITIONS

Two **History of Medicine exhibitions** are being developed for the Wellcome Building. One of the exhibitions will be a permanent display and will serve as a general introduction to the subject.

The other will change every 3-6 months and will cover specific topics of interest in the field of medical history. The permanent exhibit is entitled **Medicine in Time** and will feature five themes of general interest: Plagues and Peoples, Hospitals, The Clinical Encounter, Pharmacopoeia and Science and Medicine. The first temporary exhibition is entitled **The Exploration of Man** and will focus on man's changing perception of the human body through the ages. Environmentally controlled showcases will enable rare and delicate materials from the Wellcome Institute Library collections to be displayed, together with objects from the Wellcome Galleries at the Science Museum.

PHOTOGRAPHIC SERVICE

As part of its headquarters refurbishment project, the Wellcome Trust is setting up a comprehensive **Photographic Service** which will provide images for all sections of the Trust and for all those outside the Trust who request copies of material held in the Wellcome Institute Library and its archives.

For many decades, the Wellcome Institute has supplied photographs as part of the library services, mainly to academics, members of staff and visitors to the Library — but also in response to outside requests. This service will help to publicise the immense pictorial resources of the Wellcome Institute and provide an express service for commercial and media clients. The service will also provide pictures from the Tropical Diseases and Iconographic Collections Videodiscs.