

Preface



Writing the preface to the first issue of a new international journal gives the editors a feeling of history. Vol. 1, no. 1 is something that readers look back upon with curiosity and even awe.

It is also the place where we must state our purpose, record our prehistory and thank our supporters.

As our cover states, the field of *Health Transition Review* is 'the cultural, social and behavioural determinants of health'. It is taken for granted by nearly everyone that the provision of modern medical services reduces ill health and lowers mortality levels, and there is a vast literature on the subject. It has also been increasingly agreed that material living standards – incomes, and those things that high incomes can purchase such as better housing, more adequate clothing and an ampler and more nutritious diet – also help to reduce morbidity and mortality levels.

It has become clear from recent research that there is an equally important, if less obvious, third factor, what we could call 'the health transition factor'. Societies with similar levels of health provision and comparable incomes enjoy vastly different levels of health and exhibit starkly contrasting mortality levels. This can also be true of different cultures in the same society and even of different families or households in apparently homogeneous villages or suburbs. Clearly we are recording contrasting life styles and even philosophies of life, different attitudes toward child rearing and probably the place of children in society, and widely separated beliefs about the extent to which individuals can make choices and control their destinies and those of others close to them. It has also been shown in many societies that a mother's education is a more powerful determinant of her children's survival than is the family income or access to a doctor or hospital. Much of this research has been carried out in the contemporary Third World, yet it seems likely that the mortality decline in the West in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was also propelled by social as well as medical change.

The research and scientific literature on the cultural and social determinants of health is still comparatively meagre. Researchers have not identified all the cultural and social elements of importance nor do they know why or how they achieve their impact. Although health transition knowledge is already sufficient to allow some health interventions to be devised, the more common situation is that we do not have sufficient knowledge to be able to employ this information to improve health and reduce mortality. Yet the information now available suggests that health transition knowledge has the potential to improve the human condition.

In *Health Transition Review* we look forward to publishing articles identifying and measuring the impact of cultural, social and behavioural forces on health and on mortality. We anticipate publishing research findings on how the impact on health is actually achieved, and how induced social and behavioural changes can improve health. We welcome theoretical explorations of the health transition field, methodological contributions, review articles and studies of the cultural, social and behavioural contributions to historical mortality or morbidity declines. To foster debate we encourage critical comments on our published articles and short notes on controversial topics.

This journal is receiving major initial support from the Rockefeller Foundation. The Foundation came early into the field, perceiving the significance of the research findings that were being published, and establishing an exploratory program. That program was conceived by senior officers of the

Foundation including Kenneth Prewitt, Kenneth Warren, Scott Halstead, Sheldon Segal and Joyce Moock. John Caldwell acted as adviser and worked with Pat Caldwell in helping to establish the program, while Sally Findley was appointed as a Foundation officer to develop it.

The exploratory program defined the area and stimulated interest around the world, thus making this journal possible. Through it were organized Health Transition Workshops in 1989 at major centres of health transition research: at the Australian National University, based at the Health Transition Centre of the University's National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health; at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, where a meeting was organized by John Cleland and Allan Hill; and at the Harvard School of Public Health, where health transition work had been led by Lincoln Chen, Arthur Kleinman and Robert LeVine. The workshops received inputs from another important centre of health transition research, the Population Studies Center at the University of Pennsylvania where research had been led by Samuel Preston, Douglas Ewbank and Etienne van de Walle. The proceedings of all these workshops are in the process of publication, the first two by the Health Transition Centre as part of an initial program associated with *Health Transition Review* aiming at developing the field and defining areas where research might make contributions.¹ In addition the program also republished in 1989 some of the classic papers in the field which had created sufficient interest to establish the program in the first place.²

The *Review* will initially be published twice a year, in April and October, but the number of issues may later be increased. There will also be special supplementary issues from workshops or on topics of central interest to the field. The *Review* is in good hands: those who have come to its help as Associate Editors and Members of the Editorial Advisory Board include a broad spectrum of people who have developed the health transition field. The Publication Manager is Jennifer Braid and much of the copy editing is carried out by Wendy Cosford.

The *Review* hopes to be the place where breakthrough research papers are published and where interventions improving the human condition are first reported. We hope it will play a significant role in developing the field of health transition and in inspiring further original work.

John C. Caldwell and Gigi Santow
Editors

1 Caldwell, J.C., Findley, S., Caldwell, P., Santow, M.G., Cosford, W.H., Braid, J., & Broers-Freeman, D. (eds) 1990, *What We Know About Health Transition*, Health Transition Series No. 2, ANU, Canberra; Cleland, J. and Hill, A., *The Health Transition: Methods and Measures*, Health Transition Series No. 3, forthcoming 1991.

2 Caldwell, J.C. & Santow, M.G. (eds) 1989, *Selected Readings in the Cultural, Social and Behavioural Determinants of Health*, Health Transition Series No. 1, Australian National University, Canberra.