Editorial

ISQua initiatives 1998

It is fitting that this issue of the ISQua Journal should reflect two streams of significant interest in quality in health care circles — primary health care and accreditation. Particularly in western countries, there is an increasing shift away from traditional care-provision sites to the use of home-based care settings as part of integrated health care systems. There has been a similar strong shift in various national accreditation programs to focus on improving the quality and appropriateness of health care and services, no matter where they are delivered.

The ISQua Accreditation Symposium in Chicago in late 1997 was a stimulating and historic occasion, and proved that the world can be a small place. Delegates came together from over 40 countries and endorsed a major plan for the development of an international framework of principles designed to underpin standards for the accreditation of health care services. A further part of this process will be the planned development of a peer assessment program for national health care accreditation agencies. At the same time, formation of an international accreditation federation will draw together people and organizations interested in these issues.

A driving force for these particular projects was the steady number of requests from developing countries for help in getting started with national accreditation programs and standards. Once work has been completed on the framework of principles, establishment and implementation of new national programs can be underpinned by this accepted international set of principles. Each country's own accreditation processes can be validated and tested using these principles.

All of these initiatives were agreed to be the responsibility of ISQua (The International Society for Quality in Health Care) which as a non-aligned independent organization has formed an accreditation steering committee to guide development of this framework. The Committee is now moving forward with a strong focus on reporting achievements and debating further steps at the next Accreditation Symposium to be held in Budapest early in October 1998.

The ISQua Feasibility Paper, which explains the background to ISQua's program of work, and the report of the Chicago Accreditation Symposium are published in this issue. Both documents emphasize that national accreditation approaches within any country must reflect that country's specific cultural perspectives on health. Further, the paper emphasizes that ISQua does not consider itself to be in the business of surveying and accrediting particular health services within any individual country.

Establishment of the International Accreditation Federation will be a complex exercise. ISQua has made a strong commitment to seeking advice via extensive consultation with many interested groups and organizations. To support the work of this project as far as possible, we are drawing on the wisdom of experience and currently existing sources of help as well as gathering together appropriate resources.

As an international body, ISQua has a key role in addressing what has to be achieved in quality health care issues across the globe. We look forward to member involvement in these major initiatives.

Chris W. Brook
ISQua President, 1997–1999