

1. **The Concept of Institutional Linking or Twinning**

Linking or twinning can be defined as a special professional relationship of co-operation between two health institutions. Frequently one is in a developed country and the second in a developing country [North-South link]. Other but rarer linkages have been established between two or more developing country institutions [South-South link]. A link arrangement can be formal or informal but it must be both free and independent and able to cut across geographical and political boundaries.

The arrangement should be used to promote specific objectives. It should represent the desire of the institutions involved to share research, learning and teaching experiences, to enhance management and organizational capability, to exchange ideas and to co-operate in the solution of common problems. A twinning demands useful and well-maintained contacts, good communication and a continuous exchange of information and people. There should be scope to involve people of different age-groups and different professional skills, and a worthwhile link will provide opportunities for a continuous process of learning. Known and successful links have been established between universities, medical schools, nursing colleges, district health authorities and libraries. One ambitious scheme links two countries, Wales and Lesotho, and has involved the twinning of schools, colleges, the Young Farmers Unions and, shortly, District Health Authorities.

Twinning, if successful, may develop into tripling and still further into regional or international net-working. The aim of a network is not to subordinate institutions into a common pattern, rather to increase the ability of each to respond to the particular problems and opportunities it faces.