International Public Health Before The World Health Organization

The history of WHO cannot be fully understood today without appreciating the often complex background of international public health that existed in the years between the First and Second World Wars. When it came into being, WHO inherited a legacy that included many challenges, tensions, contests over territory, and conflicts over priorities. Echoes of some of these can still be heard today. This presentation charts the key events and developments in international health that occurred in the first half of the 20th century. It follows the transfer of functions from the Office International d’Hygiène Publique, the League of Nations Health Organization, and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, to WHO. It describes how many individuals whose careers began in interwar international health agencies were recruited to WHO and helped shape the Organization in its early years.

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