

STATEMENT OF THE BOARD OF CENCAM¹

THE NEED FOR INTERVENTIONS AND INTERVENTION STUDIES IN THE SUGARCANE INDUSTRY

September 3, 2014

CENCAM believes that its goals to reduce the prevalence of CKD in Central America and to facilitate research collaborations to advance towards a full understanding of the complex causality of this fatal disease, should go hand in hand to prevent the disease by all available means.

While the epidemic is likely multi-causal and further investigation is needed to fully uncover the complex etiology of the disease, CENCAM supports the widespread consensus among researchers that the MeN epidemic is, to an important degree, occupationally related. We have also agreed that, although various occupations may be affected and the extent of disease within each occupation has not been investigated, sugarcane workers are the worker population most affected by MeN in Central America.

We believe that workplace interventions, particularly among sugarcane workers, constitute an important area of research that could prevent and/or slow the onset of disease while also helping to determine its etiology. We can intervene now in one of the risk factors that has been identified as a likely key etiologic factor, which is heat stress and consequent dehydration. It is notable that reduction or elimination of these risk factors has benefits beyond that of preventing MeN. We are concerned that recent statements which have focused only on the absence of definitive evidence, while ignoring the scientific studies that suggest heat stress may play an important role, only impede the implementation of beneficial changes in work practices.

We urge all social sectors who are concerned about MeN —government, industry, workers' organizations, universities, public health organizations, and international agencies— to work together to implement and evaluate interventions aimed at promoting beneficial work practices that will improve the health of all workers.

CENCAM:

- Calls for support of workplace interventions in the sugarcane industry, as well as in other industries, that diminish heat stress.
- Calls upon government, industry, workers' organizations, universities, public health organizations, and international agencies to support neutral research into risk factors associated with working conditions and appropriate models for intervention.
- CENCAM reaffirms its desire to work with all social sectors, including private actors in the affected industries and local and national governments, to increase understanding of MeN and to leverage that understanding to effectively and sustainably reduce the incidence of the disease.

¹The Consortium on the Epidemic of Nephropathy in Central America and Mexico (CENCAM) is a consortium of researchers united in the conduct of research aimed at combating rising rates of chronic kidney disease of non-traditional origin (CKDnT) in Mesoamerica. CENCAM was founded in November 2012 at the First International Research Workshop on Mesoamerican Nephropathy (MeN) in Costa Rica and aims to reduce the prevalence of CKD in Central America and to facilitate research collaborations.