



A "Dicey" Flu Prediction



By Don Lyman, MD

"THE COMING FLU PANDEMIC" paints a gloomy picture of the catastrophe that may transpire if this and that happen. While it is all plausible, when you connect the multiple dots, the probability that we're on a trajectory to another "Spanish Flu" pandemic is dicey. The Spanish Flu is one of only two historical events that put a major dent in global population growth (the other was the plague pandemics of the Middle Ages); that's only one flu catastrophe per 5,000 years of recorded history. Predicting epidemics is a less exact science than is predicting the stock market.

The presentation made by Dr. Gibson relates to how poorly prepared we are for such an eventuality. Despite our huge knowledge of viruses and vaccines, our disproportionately large national expenditures for medical care (15 percent of GDP vs. 11 percent for the runner-up), our current national priority on bioterrorism preparedness, and our exquisite ability to identify the genetic makeup of microorganisms, the basic organizational structure of American health care is not set up to address such a misadventure.

I remember very similar angst that precipitated the ill fated national swine flu immunization campaign of 1976. We performed poorly; the epidemic never came!

Despite the article's title, its main message is not that a pandemic is imminent. It is that we are not well prepared. SSVMS physicians should take this opportunity to learn about the possibility of pandemic flu and about what to do if it hits.

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