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CEPI | New vaccines for a safer world

Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations

Newsletter 19 January 2018

Address from our CEO



Happy 2018 to everyone! I hope you all enjoyed your holiday break and were able to rest and to spend time with friends and family.

Here in London, as in much of the rest of the Northern Hemisphere, 2018 has begun with media buzz about the ramping up of the so-called “Australian Flu”, the H3N2 influenza that hit Australia particularly hard last fall and against which available vaccines have demonstrated an effectiveness of only about 10%. Demand for this year’s vaccine has predictably increased and spot shortages have been reported in many locations.

As it happens, the first book I read this year, while stopping in Iceland for a few days on the way back to London, was set during another terrible flu epidemic, one that we will hear much about in 2018, which marks its centennial. *Moonstone: the boy who never was*, by the prize-winning Icelandic author Sjón, is set in the fall of 1918 and somehow at once a tale about the impact of the Spanish flu on Reykjavik, a gay teenager coming of age on the margins of society, and Icelandic home rule. In its early pages, before the arrival of the flu on the tramp steamer *Botnia*, Sjón describes the crowds in Reykjavik that gathered on Skólavarda Hill to watch the eruption of Katla, one of the largest and most dangerous volcanoes in Iceland. In *Moonstone*, the eruption is symbolic, serving merely to create a sense of foreboding. Sjón does not suggest (nor, to my knowledge, does any other reputable author) that the explosion of Katla had anything to do with the peculiar ferocity of the epidemic that followed. [1]

I was primed, however, to notice this conjunction of environmental and epidemic events. By chance, the last book that I read in 2017 was Professor Kyle Harper’s magisterial *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire*, which draws on close readings of classical texts, a deep understanding of Roman history, and the latest findings in climate science and paleogenetics to paint a frightening portrait of a society under increasing stress. Professor Harper makes a deeply compelling case that the combination of increasing environmental instability and the emergence of pandemic or near-pandemic plagues (fostered by the disease ecology of the extended Roman Empire) in the Late Roman Era destabilized the Empire, undermined its resilience to internal and external threats, and contributed substantially to its implosion in the 5th and 6th centuries CE. If you care about the threat of emerging disease and can read only one book on the topic this year, this is the book you should read.

So 2018 will be a year in which we hear much about the risk of epidemics and pandemics. It represents the centennial of the worst epidemic in recorded history. Next week in Davos, the World Economic Forum will sponsor a number of events that at least implicitly acknowledge this important anniversary. There is one other anniversary to note, which passed quietly yesterday, and that is that CEPI has just completed its first year. I am very much looking forward to its second.

Richard Hatchett, CEPI CEO

[1] From its arrival on October 19, 1918, the Spanish flu spread with astonishing rapidity, peaking about 3 weeks later and causing about 500 deaths on the small island. The attack rate in Reykjavik exceeded 60% and the case fatality proportion has been estimated at 2.6%. See Gottfredsson M [The Spanish flu in Iceland 1918. Lessons in medicine and history.] Laeknabladid 2008;94:737-45.

Epidemic preparedness on the world's agenda

One of the key challenges facing us all today is how to commit to international collaboration as a way of solving critical global challenges. The threat of epidemics is one such challenge.

As world leaders head to Davos next week we will see epidemic preparedness take a central role in the World Economic Forum's programme.

Related events will be:

- A pandemic simulation series for world leaders (CEPI will be there to support)
- Dialogues on biological threats, global health security, and antimicrobial resistance
- Public sessions on epidemic readiness and global health

If you can't be there in person you can still follow what's happening and take part in the debate here.

New Appointment

CEPI this week announced the appointment of Dr. Melanie Saville as CEPI's permanent Director of Vaccine Development. Melanie joined CEPI in November 2017 as the Head of Clinical development assuming a series of critical leadership roles, becoming a core member of CEPI's Technical Due Diligence Team and taking responsibility for the development of CEPI's Lassa clinical program. In this latter capacity she has engaged colleagues at WHO, EDCTP, and FIND to bring together a "supercoalition" of partners to address the particular challenges that Lassa presents. As Melanie steps into her new role, we want to extend a huge and collective thank you to Dr. Georges Thiry, who has led the Vaccine Development team with insight, grace, and good humour in an interim capacity since July. Georges's deep expertise and steady and imperturbable leadership have contributed enormously to CEPI's development. Georges will continue to contribute to CEPI's efforts as a consultant and key member of the team going forward.

CEPI in the States

On Thursday, January 4th, CEPI officially opened its US office in Washington DC with an 'open-house'. We hosted friends from industry, academia government and the media. There was a real sense of excitement about what CEPI has accomplished so far and to learn more about what lies ahead.



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