



Health watch

Larry Madoff reviews the recent international meeting on emerging diseases and surveillance

Larry Madoff is chair of the scientific programme committee for the IMED

The international meeting on emerging diseases and surveillance (IMED 2011) took place in Vienna, Austria. This was the third meeting including a keynote speech delivered by Marc Sprenger, the new director of the ECDC. IMED was first held in 2007 and during this short time has become a key conference for those in public health and related disciplines around the globe. Emerging diseases are those that are either newly discovered—SARS is a good example of such a disease—or

those known diseases that are expanding their reach either into increasing numbers of cases or into new geographical regions. Examples of these latter include pandemic influenza or dengue.

One of the most important aspects of IMED is its focus on the concept of “one health.” This concept considers health and disease without regard to species, recognising the commonality of health interests between humans

and animals both wild and domesticated. Fully two-thirds of emerging diseases are shared between species. The so-called “swine flu” (pandemic H1N1 influenza) is one such example, but others include rabies, SARS, Ebola and the West Nile virus. Therefore, IMED fully integrates the veterinary health community into all aspects of the meeting. Some of its sessions deal primarily with veterinary diseases, while others deal with diseases that affect both humans and animals. For example, an important session was held on the recent outbreak of Q fever in the Netherlands. This bacterial disease affects livestock but also spreads to nearby humans and causes pneumonia and other sometimes serious or even lethal infections. Other IMED sessions included discussions of public communication of outbreaks, antimicrobial resistance, vectorborne diseases, pandemic influenza, climate change in infectious diseases and foodborne infections. In all, more than 40 experts delivered invited lectures at IMED sessions and nearly 400 attendees presented abstracts.

The Q fever session highlights another important focus of IMED: emerging infectious diseases in the European region. IMED’s location in Europe and its co-sponsorship by a number of European organisations allows it to emphasise regional developments within the framework of a truly international event. Finally, IMED has a focus on the methodology involved in the detection and surveillance of emerging diseases, a task of both the official sector and nongovernmental organisations and an area of crucial ongoing research.

IMED 2011 is co-sponsored by the programme for monitoring emerging diseases (better known to its more than 50,000 readers as ProMED-mail), the ECDC, the European commission, the European society for clinical microbiology and infectious diseases (ESCMID), HealthMap (a program based at Harvard medical school), EcoHealth Alliance (formerly the Wildlife Trust), the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE). The meeting is organised by the International Society for Infectious Diseases. More than 650 scientists and public health officials participated in IMED 2011 representing more than 70 countries. ★

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