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two main groups—one familiar “sporadic” disease (that is, Jakob's disease) and another affecting a younger age group, as in Creutzfeldt's case. The differing features between the groups may reflect infection with a differently conformed prion with a particular pattern of spread throughout the central nervous system. Lymphoeritic system origins of, or infection by, this prion may contribute to the different clinical picture.

Creutzfeldt took seven years and considerable pains to determine the originality of the disease he described. We should emulate his rigour and acknowledge his primacy.

Conclusion

Without doubt, general anxiety about so dreadful a possibility as bovine spongiform encephalopathy caus-

ing a similar disease in humans resulted in many works involved with bovine spongiform encephalopathy and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease having to reach precipitate conclusions in which public safety was rightly the prime consideration. I believe that the evidence now available casts serious doubts on the case for a causal link between bovine spongiform encephalopathy and “new” variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. The medical profession should, at least, be publicly debating this as an issue. The purpose of this paper is to start that process.

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Good Europe-wide surveillance and notification may help countries to prepare for epidemics such as flu.
coordination of expertise for outbreaks beyond EU borders is unclear. In some cases Europe has depended on the expertise of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Of 43 past and current participants in the European Programme on Intervention Epidemiology Training (designed to enable the development of a cadre of epidemiologists with common training within the EU), 27 responded to a questionnaire on participation in the management of an international outbreak. Only a third had been involved in European networks, and fewer than half had participated in managing an international outbreak. Those participating in the programme should be more involved in international incidents and networking for further development of capacity within the EU.

Failure to share lessons—Reports of lessons from international incidents have generally been inadequate. In only two of the four outbreaks with clinical cases in Europe were final reports shared with the organisations concerned. There is a need to disseminate best practice in reporting results of investigations. The difficult issue of ownership of data needs further consideration.

Discussion

Recent developments to facilitate international outbreak detection and management through the networking approach within the EU have been effective in improving recognition and response to international infectious threats.16–18 However, weaknesses remain and opportunities for strengthening collaboration were highlighted by this study. National surveillance, which is the basis for effective international surveillance, needs to be improved. The surveillance system in one member state failed to ascertain 60% of community acquired legionnaires’ disease.19 It is likely that the coverage achieved in other surveillance systems is similar or lower. Even for meningococcal disease, where it is commonly thought that almost all cases are notified, the best estimates suggest that only about 90% of cases are reported.19 There is a clear requirement for enhancement of many national surveillance systems.

From the results of our study we recommend that the European Commission further develops existing national surveillance systems. This will need to be done within a framework in which organisational, financial, and legal uncertainties are clarified. The existing networks have shown their value, and we do not see any additional value in the development of a single, centralised European surveillance centre, though coordination at the European level is essential.20 The capacity for effective surveillance is present across Europe, and available evidence shows that it can be harnessed effectively with the use of modern communications.

Untoward events, natural or deliberate, such as those due to terrorism or biowarfare may appear simultaneously in multiple locations. Recognition of the nature of the event requires alert clinical services and effective reporting to national surveillance authorities. Early recognition that the event is of international importance requires swift exchange of rumour, data, and information between national authorities.

Increasing globalisation is likely to lead to further international outbreaks. Responding effectively to these requires coordination of national surveillance and response systems within the EU and support for enhanced surveillance and control activities in developing countries. We have shown how a systems approach to international surveillance and control of disease can reveal areas of concern and identify recommendations for improvement.

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Endpiece

Before sildenafil

Why then send Lampreys? Fie, for shame!
‘Twill set a virgin’s blood on flame.
This to fifteen a proper gift!
It might lend sixty-five a lift.

“To a Young Lady, with some Lampreys” Poems on Several Occasions. 1720, 1731, by John Gay (1685-1732).

Submitted by Fred Charatan, retired geriatric physician, Florida