Welcome and Symposium Introduction

It is a special pleasure to welcome you to this second symposium on the medical and public health response to bioterrorism. The first symposium 18 months ago was fully subscribed. Based on the continuing flood of visits to our web site since then, it is apparent that it was reasonably successful in meeting the need for communication, especially to the medical and public health communities, of the realities of biological weapons and their use as instruments of terror in the civilian setting.

A number of special symposia and meetings have occurred over the past 18 months. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and US Army Research Institute of Infectious Disease (USAMRIID) presented a 3-day telecast that reached at least 15,000 persons, and bioterrorism has now begun to appear as a regular subject in the program of many national and regional medical meetings.

As time passed, the salient question was posed as to whether there was a need for a follow-up to the first symposium and, if so, what its content might be. With Drs. Tara O'Toole and Tom Inglesby from the Center for Civilian Biodefense Strategies serving as point persons for a program committee, the conclusion was reached that a national symposium on civilian bioterrorism oriented primarily to the public health and medical audience was useful and should be continued. However, a somewhat different emphasis from the first symposium was considered desirable to focus on major issues that so far were proving to be especially troublesome or inadequately addressed, and I will return to these in just a moment.

The attendance that could be expected was speculative, but there was unanimity that, because of the number of other symposia, there would certainly be no more and perhaps less demand for the second symposium than for the first. We were wrong. We are again oversubscribed.

At a special reception hosted by Dr. Steven Knapp, provost and vice president of the Johns Hopkins University, we announced a very generous 3-year grant to the center of $3.5 million provided by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. We are, indeed, grateful. It will cover nearly half of our projected budget over the next 3 years, and we expect to see further development of our activities during that time.

The meeting has several themes or areas of special emphasis. For each of these topics, the committee identified those individuals who it considered might best address the issues, and virtually every invitation that was extended was accepted. An exception involved key congressional leaders who were unexpectedly preoccupied with other issues, such as the possible effect of dimpled chad, hanging chad, and so forth.

The first presentation examines the current status and nature of the challenge of bioweapons to national and international security and the nature of the national strategy to deal with the problem.

A discussion on surveillance, at the national and international levels, is followed by research on the capacity of our health care system to respond to an epidemic.

We are privileged to have with us Ambassador Richard Butler of Australia, now diplomat in residence at the Council on Foreign Relations, formerly Australian ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations and later executive chairman of the UNSCOM mission in Iraq. He is author of *The Greatest Threat*.

The focus of later presentations includes the difficult challenges in dealing with a major epidemic, particularly in the public health, legal, and media areas, and strategic priorities for the longer term as we as a nation struggle to come to grips with practical approaches in prevention.

Concluding presentations are by Dr. John Hamre, president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies and former deputy secretary of the Department of Defense, and Senator Ted Kennedy.

An interactive scenario is also planned in a format similar to the one so widely appreciated last year.

D. A. Henderson, MD, MPH[a]

[a]Center for Civilian Biodefense Strategies, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21202

Address correspondence to: D. A. Henderson, Founding Director, Center for Civilian Biodefense Strategies, Johns Hopkins University, 111 Market Place, Suite 830, Baltimore, MD 21202; tel. 410-223-1667; fax 410-223-1665; e-mail <dahzero@aol.com>.

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