

Introductory Editorial

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The establishment of the International Society for Influenza and other Respiratory Viruses (ISIRV) in September 2005 fulfills a long unmet need to provide a focus for sharing the results of scientific, medical and public health research through the co-ordination of international forums (see <http://www.isirv.org/home/home.cfm>); it has also provided the incentive for the launch of a new journal dedicated to this important field.

Although William Farr described the phenomenon of excess mortality associated with influenza outbreaks as early as 1847, it is only in quite recent years that we have begun to appreciate the true annual burden of influenza and of other respiratory viruses on human society. The previously hidden impact of influenza in the tropics has been uncovered and previously unrecognized viruses including human metapneumovirus, coronaviruses and parvovirus have recently been found to be the cause of human respiratory disease. Through systematic searching with new molecular techniques it seems likely that yet further viruses will be found to be responsible for the many cases where no causative agent is currently identified.

However, more dramatic than these annual illnesses are the unpredictable pandemics of influenza that sweep the globe three or four times a century and, as demonstrated by the emergence of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) coronavirus in 2001, the potential for new human respiratory viruses to emerge from an animal host and spread widely in the human population. While advances in

molecular biology have provided the ability to probe the mechanisms by which these relatively simple disease agents emerge and exert their effects on the human host, and even to reconstruct the virus of the devastating Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918–19, we are yet to translate these findings into effective means of averting or controlling such outbreaks. National and international concern prompted by SARS and fears that the ongoing H5N1 avian influenza panzootic may give rise to a human influenza pandemic, the impact of which we can only speculate, has recently provided both impetus and financial commitment for the acceleration of research programs to address these shortcomings.

The number of bibliographic citations relating to influenza virus and to respiratory viruses in general have more than doubled in the last decade. *Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses* will now provide a journal dedicated to respiratory virus infections in their many forms. It will be an international platform for discussion among experts and the sharing of new information that will help to shape the way we deal with both the annual impact of respiratory viruses and the future emergence of new viruses and pandemic disease. The first edition of *Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses* consists of invited position papers and reviews by experts in the field; subsequent editions will combine reviews, commentary and original research articles. I am delighted to have been invited to lead an expert editorial team that will ensure a high-quality scientific journal.