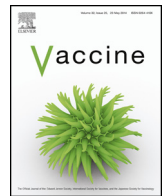




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Editorial

Proceedings Fifth ESWI Influenza Conference



This issue of *Vaccine* is dedicated to the Fifth ESWI Influenza Conference, held in the Latvian capital of Riga, from 14 to 17 September 2014. Since its first edition in 2002, the ESWI Influenza Conferences have grown into the largest European scientific conferences entirely dedicated to influenza. In keeping with its excellent scientific reputation, the fifth edition has given the floor to the most renowned influenza scientists in order to showcase recent advances in basic science and the control and prevention of influenza, to stimulate the scientific debate on novel, unpublished research data and to advance our understanding of influenza by identifying new research routes. ESWI does not only focus on bringing scientists together to share top-level scientific data and state of the art knowledge. Also top-level policy makers attend the conferences, participating in the Science Policy Interface programme, a tailor-made track of seven sessions covering the broad field of influenza. To build a bridge between science and the audience and to stimulate debate and interaction in the Science Policy Interface sessions, ESWI introduced the Reflection Teams, these are teams of commenters, who reflected on the session's content and Q&A from their expertise and knowledge. Reflection Teams had been differently composed every session and included public health officials, healthcare professionals, scientific experts from a different domain, journalists.

Discussions at the conference had been opened by Tonio Borg, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, who emphasized the importance of influenza prevention. "The continued focus on the promotion of vaccination as a key public health tool is both welcome and timely," Mr. Borg said. This statement was at the heart of the Fifth ESWI Influenza Conference. Indeed, remarkable examples of collaboration between various stakeholder groups and their positive impact on public health were presented and discussed, demonstrating the key importance of interacting with stakeholders and managing the dialogue.

The Multiparty Group for Advice on Science (MUGAS) Foundation offered a groundbreaking satellite symposium on the review and statistical analysis of oseltamivir data. The aim of the MUGAS Foundation was to offer a thorough, independent and transparent meta-analysis of published and unpublished data from clinical trials, carried during the procedure of licensure of the neuraminidase inhibitors. Preliminary results of the meta-analysis were presented by Joanna Dobson (London School of Hygiene and Tropical

Medicine, UK). Her team had been given access to all the requested reports and datasets, including the Individual Patient Data. The results of the analysis indicate a highly significant reduction in time to alleviation of major symptoms of influenza. There was also a highly significant reduction in lower respiratory infections requiring antibiotics. The study results have now been published in *The Lancet*.

Clearly, the emergence of the H7N9 and H10N8 influenza viruses and the continued threat of H5N1, have emphasized the unpredictable and global character of influenza outbreaks. To cope with a future pandemic outbreak of influenza, heightened readiness is needed on a global scale. In the aftermath of the H1N1-pandemic, however, WHO revised its pandemic response strategy. The revision is inspired by demands for national flexibility. The new approach encourages this flexibility by basing national actions on risk assessment, resources and needs. But at the same time, some mechanisms remain unclear. For example, vaccines will not be ready on time unless there is an effective mechanism informing companies to switch production from seasonal to pandemic vaccines. Obtaining clarity is urgent.

The global character of influenza outbreaks brings us to another interesting point of attention: outbreak prevention and control in developing countries. The Fifth ESWI Influenza Conference addressed this topic extensively in a session dedicated to maternal immunization, focussing on drivers and barriers in low-income countries. This session was made possible thanks to the specific support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

In conclusion, we can say that the Fifth ESWI Influenza Conference provided an accurate picture of the challenges in the influenza field. There is, for instance, a great need of new vaccines that protect against a broader range of influenza virus strains. Investing in vaccine development is therefore key, not only against influenza but also against other infectious diseases, notably against Ebola. After all, it is striking to note that several years ago, we were on the verge of developing a preventive medicine or a treatment for Ebola. But we did not. We are equally ill-prepared when it comes to Rift Valley Fever, MERS CoV and rabies. So now is the time to invest in research and to develop candidate vaccines and therapies. Preferably, we do this in a multidisciplinary approach. After all, emerging and re-emerging infectious clearly demonstrate that human, animal and ecosystem health are inextricably linked.

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