

Biopreparedness and Public Health

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Series A: Chemistry and Biology

Biopreparedness and Public Health

Exploring Synergies

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Preface

The threat from the terrorist use of pathogens has been a major security concern in recent years, particularly after the anthrax letter attacks in the USA in 2001. This threat of intentional outbreaks of diseases stands side by side with the constantly changing natural threat from diseases, epidemics, and pandemics, as illustrated in recent years by the H1N1 influenza pandemic, the SARS outbreak, and the H5N1 avian influenza event. While naturally occurring diseases – both newly emerging and well-known ones – claim the life and health of many people year after year, bioterrorism events have so far had a very limited health impact.

Protection, prevention, and response measures for natural disease outbreaks and for bioterrorism events differ greatly between countries. At the national level these aspects all too often are handled by different actors with different approaches under different funding arrangements. In many states, resources and political attention are so stretched that the bioterrorism threat is not dealt with at all. While natural and deliberate outbreaks of disease differ in a number of ways – e.g., the types of diseases involved, risk communications, or the legal follow-up – in many areas the differences are likely to be small, in particular those involving non-disease-specific public health detection and response activities. Finding these areas of overlap, identifying the differences and the gaps in preparedness measures, and thereby contributing to streamlining response measures so as to enable them to protect public health from all three types of biological threats – natural, accidental, deliberate – is an urgent need for countries worldwide, and in particular for countries whose public health systems are already overburdened by natural disease response.

To address the issue, 34 experts from 17 European countries, including Turkey, as well as the USA, Israel, the World Health Organization, and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control gathered for a NATO-sponsored Advanced Research Workshop entitled “Exploring synergies between bioterrorism

preparedness and general public health measures” in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) in Belgrade, Serbia, during 15–17 November 2010. In addition to the 34 workshop participants, the first half-day of the workshop, with introductory and more general presentations, drew a number of local experts, illustrating the interest in the issues under discussion. Most notably, the workshop participants welcomed Zoran Jeftic, State Secretary from the Serbian Ministry of Defence, and Lee Litzenberger, Deputy Head of Mission of the US Embassy in Belgrade, who addressed the gathering during the opening ceremony.

The workshop focused on Southeastern Europe, a region where some of the diseases caused by agents of bioterrorism concern, such as tularemia or certain types of hemorrhagic fevers, are endemic. This region also regularly experiences natural outbreaks of other diseases whose causative agents also have relevance as potential bioweapons risk agents. The workshop was not only an opportunity to learn from local experiences in fighting these diseases, but also a unique occasion for regional and global networking.

The workshop addressed the current level of threat from naturally occurring infectious diseases and the current bioterrorism threat, the response and preparedness efforts in different countries of Southeastern Europe, France, Germany, Israel, Poland, the United States, the European Union, and globally. From these empirical data, commonalities, differences, and gaps among states’ efforts and between general public health measures and biopreparedness were extracted and discussed. Lessons were derived on where bioterrorism preparedness and response measures at the moment and in the future can benefit other areas of public health and vice versa.

To capture the information that was exchanged during the workshop and further explore synergies for public health preparedness, selected workshop participants were asked to write detailed case studies on the relationship between biopreparedness efforts and other public health measures in their countries or their international organizations, which – together with a number of chapters on more general bio-threat related topics – are assembled in this international scientific monograph.

The thanks of the editors of this volume go to NATO’s Science for Peace and Security Programme for funding the original workshop, to the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) – and in particular to Academician Prof. Ljubisav Rakic – for hosting the workshop in Belgrade, and to two external reviewers who contributed valuable comments during the preparation of this book – Brig. Gen. (ret) Mario Stefano Peragallo, MD, Consultant in Preventive Medicine and Hygiene, Italian Army Medical Research Center, Rome (Italy), and Brig. Gen. (ret) Ioannis Galatas, MD, Consultant in Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Medical/Hospital CBRNE Planner, and Senior Asymmetric Threats Analyst, Athens (Greece).

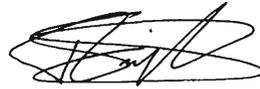
Last but not least, the editors thank the participants and guests at the workshop, and all the authors of this book who were willing to give part of their limited time and share their experiences to make further advancements on the route towards a world free from the threat of deliberate disease.

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