

# Lessons from Anthrax as a Biological Weapon

The death of an index case from inhalational anthrax in October this year, the infection of several people, and the confirmation of anthrax being present in letters posted - taken together spell the use of anthrax as a biological weapon to inflict harm and panic amongst the Americans.

The use of bacteria and viruses as weapons has occurred in the past. A/Prof Lim Meng Kin's paper (refer to page 3) gives examples of such instances.

There are several organisms that may be used as biological weapons: smallpox, plague, and bacillus causing botulism.

Are there lessons for us? The answer is there are several. We can profit from the American experience as they grapple with how to cope with anthrax as a biological weapon and draw some general lessons.

First, there is a need to be vigilant for unusual symptoms in the patients that doctors may come across in the present

day and age. Apart from epidemics that are inflicted by nature, we now also need to consider possible man-made ones. The index case of inhalational anthrax certainly got the American doctors thinking. Similarly, we should be vigilant too.

Second, doctors should be regularly updated of the salient features of diseases that may be used for biological warfare. We are glad to receive an advisory note from our Director of Medical Services on smallpox infection, anthrax, plague and botulism, which was sent to every medical practitioner. In it, he gave information on the clinical features of these infections. Our Ministry of Health will be convening an update seminar on biological and chemical agents. All doctors should try to attend this seminar. It is scheduled for 8 December 2001 at the Auditorium of the College of Medicine Building.

Third, there is a need to maintain order and confidence in the face of biological

warfare. The American experience again provides us with takes to take note of. There are instructions made available by the Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta through its website for the public to log on to. This timely and helpful information inspired confidence. The Americans are doing it right. The Chief of Postal Services there also showed how not to do it. He just gave the raw facts without giving his worldview of what the public needs to do. This shortcoming was commented upon in his radio talk "Letter from America", recently aired over BBC.

The take-home message is that the world has reached a new point of vulnerability. We not only have naturally occurring epidemics. Potentially, we may have to contend with man-made ones too. The way ahead is to learn from what is happening in front of us. We will then be in a better position to be prepared. ■

## CHEM-BIO AGENTS - AN UPDATE

Jointly organised by MOH, CFPS & SMA

Opening Address by Prof Tan Chorh Chuan, Director of Medical Services

Date : 8 December 2001, Saturday

Time : 1.30 pm - 5.50 pm

Venue : Auditorium, College of Medicine Building

### PROGRAMME:

1.30 pm	Registration
2.00 pm	Opening Address by Prof Tan Chorh Chuan, Director of Medical Services
2.10 pm	Chemical & Biological Agents - A Historical Perspective & Overview By A/Prof Lim Meng Kin, Dept of COFM, Faculty of Medicine, NUS
2.30 pm	Part 1 - Chemical Agents*
3.40 pm	Q & A Session
3.50 pm	Tea Break
4.10 pm	Part 2 - Biological Agents**
5.20 pm	Role of Front-line Doctors By A/Prof Goh Lee Gan, Dept of COFM, Faculty of Medicine, NUS
5.40 pm	Q & A Session
5.50 pm	Close

Panel of Speakers \* : Dr Goh Siang Hiong, Dr Suresh Pillai, Dr Francis Lee, Dr Mark Leong  
\*\* : Dr Richard Bellamy, Dr Paul A Tambyah, Dr Asok, Dr Leo Yee Sin

Admission is FREE. 2 CME points. For enquiries and registration, please fax to SMA at 224 7827 or email to [sma@sma.org.sg](mailto:sma@sma.org.sg)

**PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN TO SMA SECRETARIAT AT FAX: 224 7827**

Please register me for "Chem-Bio Agents - An Update"

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