

Abstract

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS
OF EMERGING, RE-EMERGING AND
PERSISTENT DISEASES FOR THE
FUTURE OF THE HUMAN SPECIES



Emerging and re-emerging diseases are fast becoming a major public health concern the world over. Infectious diseases like tuberculosis, cholera, and even diphtheria, which once seemed to be getting under control, are making major comebacks. They are re-emerging. Even though some diseases such as poliomyelitis have been nearly wiped out, it is most likely that the vast majority of them will not be eliminated in our lifetime. According to the World Health Organization reports, at least 30 *new* diseases have been scientifically recognized around the world in the last 20 years. These emerging diseases include diseases caused by the Ebola virus from Africa, HIV and *Cryptosporidium*.

So far researchers have generally been lucky in finding new answers to the hurdles of persistent, re-emerging and most new disease entities. Specialists in community and individual health education are in contact with the population in the bid to foster preventive measures as complementary interventions to such public health research. The major and dreadful question now is what happens if the human species ran out of luck and found itself without an appropriate response to any emerging or re-emerging disease?

This presentation takes us back into history to look at some major events the world over that are related to outburst of infectious diseases, and to gather some lessons which we might be forgetting, in the bid to set the basis for future actions against this major problem. It highlights the many changes taking place within the ecosystem with the human species at the centre as actor or victim. This phenomenon seems to spare no continent and no population, especially given the increasingly easy inter-population mix these days. While some of favoring factors are man-made, others are more due to a natural evolution of things. Unfortunately scientists can't predict with precision how our species will adapt to changes over the next millennium, let alone the next million years. Based on the lessons learnt from past events, which sometimes had devastating impact on the human species, this presentation highlights the dangers the human species might run into if appropriate action is not taken immediately. It ends with some proposal of lines of action for the future.