Viral Outbreaks, Such as Influenza: What More Can We Learn From Ecology, Anthropology, and History?

An international multidisciplinary workshop at the University of Sydney, 8-9 June 2017

Conveners: Warwick Anderson and Chris Degeling (University of Sydney)
Marie Bashir Institute | Centre for Values, Ethics and the Law in Medicine | Charles Perkins Centre

What counts as expertise in understanding and responding to emergent diseases in global health? What is appropriate preparedness or an appropriate response to epidemic disease?

In 2007, Stephen S. Morse observed that “much more research is needed to better understand influenza epidemiology and transmission, [and] to design useful interventions. Historical data can clearly offer valuable insights that are highly relevant to today’s concerns, insights that in some cases can be obtained in no other way”. This workshop will bring together epidemiologists, historians, and anthropologists to reflect on outbreaks of the H5N1 influenza virus in Hong Kong and nearby parts of Asia since 1996. Our goal is to understand how environmental, animal, and public health authorities might respond ecologically to interspecies epidemic disease. That is, we want to explore some productive connections between epidemiology, ecology, the social sciences, and humanities, to identify interdisciplinary approaches that allow us to understand epidemic disease as “configuration,” in Charles Rosenberg’s formulation, and not simply “contamination”. Using H5N1 as a case study, we will look at how anthropology and history might reveal otherwise obscure aspects of the ecological configurations of emerging diseases. H5N1 seems an unusually illuminating example, with Hong Kong as an an epicenter not only of influenza but of the study of ecological approaches to emerging epidemic disease.

Lead participants: Warwick Anderson (Sydney), Chris Degeling (Sydney), Peter Doherty (Melbourne), Lyle Fearnley (Singapore University of Technology and Design), Lyn Gilbert (Sydney), Frédéric Keck (Musée du Quai Branly, Paris), Eben Kirksey (UNSW), Andrew Lakoff (Southern California), Malik Peiris (Hong Kong)

The workshop is free, but limited places are available. To register, contact James Dunk by 8 May 2017:
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Image: global spread of H5N1 map, wikipedia commons