

Short communication

Epidemic\$ and Pandemic\$ are profitable?!

Mohammad Hassan Lotfi

Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd, Iran

Influenza is a viral infection that affects mainly the nose, throat, bronchi and, occasionally, lungs. The virus is transmitted easily from person to person via droplets and small particles produced when infected people cough or sneeze. Influenza tends to spread rapidly in seasonal epidemics. In the 20th century three influenza pandemics occurred and the last one (Swine flu or A/H1N1 influenza virus) was in 2009. There are some facts and suspicious mind about that.

On 24 April 2009 WHO announced that "The United States Government has reported 7 confirmed human cases of Swine Influenza A/H1N1 in the USA (5 in California and 2 in Texas) and 9 suspect cases. All seven confirmed cases had mild Influenza-Like Illness (ILI), with only one requiring brief hospitalization. No deaths have been reported." Reports of Swine flu cases continued until on 11 June 2009 Dr Margaret Chan, the director general of the World Health Organization, announced to the world's media: "I have conferred with leading influenza experts, virologists, and public health officials. In line with procedures set out in the International Health Regulations, I have sought guidance and advice from an **Emergency Committee** established for this purpose. On the basis of

available evidence, and these expert assessments of the evidence, the scientific criteria for an influenza pandemic have been met. The world is now at the start of the 2009 influenza pandemic ^[1]. But specialists and governments stated otherwise.

About one year later -2010-, governments that took advice from WHO are unwinding their vaccine contracts, and billions of dollars from health budgets spent on unloading stockpiles of *oseltamivir* (Tamiflu) and *zanamivir* (Relenza) ^[2]. Media covered some new news: "Drug firms 'encouraged world health body to exaggerate swine flu threat" screamed *Britain's Daily Mail* newspaper on 4 June 2010, "2 European reports criticize WHO's H1N1 pandemic guidelines as tainted" headlined *The Washington Post* on 5 June 2010. The news articles reported on two investigations: one by journalists at the *BMJ* and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, the other by the health committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) - a human-rights body based in Strasbourg, France, independent of the European Union. Both reports alleged that the WHO might had been unduly influenced by the pharmaceutical industry in declaring H1N1 flu a pandemic, and in backing widespread

vaccination and stockpiling of antiviral drugs, a claim often made by conspiracy theorists.

Paul Flynn, a UK Labour Member of Parliament and rapporteur of the PACE report said that decision making around the A/H1N1 crisis was lacking in transparency. "Some of the outcomes of the pandemic have been dramatic: distortion of priorities of public health services all over Europe, waste of huge sums of public money, provocation of unjustified fear amongst Europeans, creation of health risks through vaccines and medications which might not have been sufficiently tested before being authorized in fast-track procedures, are all examples of these outcomes. These results need to be critically examined by public health authorities at all levels with a view to rebuilding public confidence in their decisions".

According to this pandemic that never really was, WHO was declared some limits for pilgrims traveling to Mecca. The travel of many Muslims around the world to Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage was banned.

Meanwhile, according to the study of Moattari et al. out of 3000 pilgrims from Fars province who attended the Hajj 2009, just 5 pilgrims had influenza H1N1^[3]. Based on the results of the research Dr.Ebrahimi, Executive recombinant influenza vaccines, flu vaccine that used in Iran did not effective and had only commercial aspect^[4].

Now, all uncovered evidence raises troubling questions about WHO's management of this situation, Was it appropriate for WHO to take advice from experts who had declarable financial and research ties with pharmaceutical companies producing antivirals and influenza vaccines? Why was key WHO guidance authored by an influenza expert who had received payment for other work from Roche, manufacturers of oseltamivir, and GlaxoSmithKline, manufacturers of zanamivir? And why does the composition of the **Emergency Committee** from which Chan sought guidance remain a secret known only to those within WHO? Above all, how can people trust the news of WHO???

References

1. Influenza-like illness in the United States and Mexico[Cited 2012 Oct 10] .Available from: http://www.who.int/csr/don/2009_04_24/en/index.html.
2. WHO and the pandemic flu "conspiracies". BMJ; 2010. Available from: <http://www.bmj.com/content/340/bmj.c2912>.
3. Moattari A, Emami A, Moghadami M et al. Influenza viral infections among the Iranian Hajj pilgrims returning to Shiraz, Fars province, Iran. *Influenza Other Respi Viruses*. 2012 ; 6(6):e77-9.
4. Ebrahimi SM, Tebianian M. Influenza A viruses: why focusing on M2e-based universal vaccines. *Virus genes*. 2011; 42(1):1-8.