

Dr. Briggs Emphasizes the Importance of Engaging the World in Public Health Issues (5:33 minutes)

Time Stamp 00:00:00: If we look at why people, why countries, should invest in global public health, we only need to take a look at recent history. We had an outbreak of HIV. And now HIV is across the world. It came from — probably from Africa — but it soon spread across the world. We can look at the recent influenza pandemic and the cost of that. And the implications that could have been if the virus was much more lethal. That's just an example of what can happen. We can look at our own country and look at West Nile. West Nile virus started on the East Coast, and within a few years, it had devastated the songbird population across the United States. And there are people who have had West Nile who are left with neurological syndromes that they will have to deal with the rest of their lives. So West Nile wasn't something that we were worried about before. But then it came. We actually live in a very small world, and we cannot be isolationists.

Time Stamp 00:1:11: How do we stay ahead of the next pandemic? I don't think we can. I really don't. We looked. I mean, I don't think there has ever been as many resources put into trying to see what we can do against a pandemic, as was recently put into the avian and human influenzas, swine flu epidemic, pandemic, and it still spread across the world. So, you know, we can provide vaccines, but if the virus changes so that the vaccine is not efficacious, we've lost that money; we're not protecting people. So I don't think it's totally possible to be 100 percent ready for a pandemic. I think what we can do is to increase surveillance, diagnosis, so we know what's out there. We can potentially be ready. We can educate people. We can use the best possible prevention and sterilization and isolation techniques if something does happen. But I don't think we're going to be able to prevent it.

Time Stamp 00:02:26: Quarantine has an ancient history. It's actually based on a 40-day isolation. "Quarantine" — it comes from Italian, I think. Anyway, how effective is it? Well, probably not incredibly effective. It can be effective in some circumstances. There is certainly a global group working on quarantine and making it humane and how we can institute protective quarantine for the country without actually eliminating human rights. And I think that's a really important issue. I think to sort of try to save something or quarantine after the epidemic is already underway is not going to work. If you find — if we had found HIV, for example, initially, in a few people and understood what it was, then we could have quarantined and maybe solved the problem. But usually by the time the problem is known, the disease is out; it's too late to quarantine. I think also, though, there are some circumstances where quarantine is warranted, and when that does happen, then the health department should be involved to make sure that it's all done as I mentioned — humanely — and that human rights are not disregarded.

Time Stamp 00:03:53: Zoonoses — when diseases pass from an animal to a human — really accounts for more than 60 percent of the infectious diseases that we have to deal with. So you can see that the bond between humans and animals becomes very important. For example, in rabies, we don't see humans transmitting rabies from one to another. That's just a really rare occurrence, if it does happen. The diseases actually are normally transmitted through dogs through most of the world. In the United States, it's through bats. But we don't normally come into contact with bats. However, our pets do. So we need to keep our pets vaccinated. And we need to always ensure that if they are bitten by a potentially rabid animal, that the owner contacts the veterinarian to talk about it to see what can be done.

Time Stamp 00:04:51: One of the main reasons why diseases emerge is based on human behavior. So how do we begin talking about changing human behavior? I think the only way to do that is actually through education, and education has to be relevant to the population that you're talking to. So you need to be very sensitive about what type and how you're going to get the message across. But I think in the end, the only way to change human behavior is through education and convincing somebody that this is much better for them and for their human health and for their survival, and I think that's the only way to do it.