

**Synthesis of the International Symposium
On “Surveillance and Discovery in Respiratory
and Other Emerging Infectious Diseases”
May 29-31, 2011, Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia**

Following the SARS outbreak in 2003, the major threats posed by avian flu and the recent A(H1N1) 2009 pandemic, the Institut Pasteur International Network (IPIN) in the Asia-Pacific region has reacted promptly. IPIN has underlined the importance of on-site surveillance of emerging diseases and the critical aspect of handling these diseases in a targeted manner to protect local populations and limit the risk of worldwide spread. To better face this global health threat, IPIN has implemented, together with local governments and other academic institutions, number of regional coordinated actions that have been strategically oriented towards research, public health and capacity building.



The Symposium on “Surveillance and Discovery in Respiratory and Other Emerging Diseases”, organized by the Institut Pasteur International Network in the Asia-Pacific region, marked the conclusion of one of our flagship projects: SISEA (Surveillance and Interaction of Epidemics in South-East Asia). This project was a public health-oriented initiative mainly supported by the French Development Agency (AFD), but also by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

The main objective of SISEA and the HHS/ASPR projects was to contribute to the improvement of detection and response capabilities in face of emerging pathogens with epidemic potential in South-East Asia, by setting-up a laboratory-based surveillance and investigation of acute respiratory diseases in 4 countries of the region (China, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia). This project was implemented by a three-pronged approach that consisted in: (i) setting up sentinel sites for field surveillance (district and regional hospitals), (ii) increasing laboratory diagnostic capabilities (adapted diagnostic tools and training of technicians, doctors, nurses, etc.) and (iii) advising the national authorities for preparedness and readiness to outbreaks.

The present workshop aimed to be a forum for Pasteur Institutes and their partners in the Asia-Pacific Region to discuss major advances and gaps in the understanding of emerging infectious diseases. Major achievements of these projects were presented and their impact was discussed.

There were 180 participants from various national and renowned international institutions, including the delegation of directors and researchers from the Institut Pasteur International Network in the Asia-Pacific region (PR China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Lao PDR, Korea, New Caledonia and Cambodia), staff from the International Division of Institut Pasteur (France) as well as representatives from: U.S Department of Health and Human Services, World Health Organization (WHO) Geneva, WHO Cambodia, WPRO Manila, US CDC (Cambodia), REDI Center (Singapore), RIKEN (Japan), Wellcome Trust (Lao PDR and Vietnam), UNICEF (Cambodia), PATH (Cambodia), Hong Kong University, Mérieux Foundation, National Public Health Laboratory of Singapore (Ministry of Health) and many others who attended this meeting.



The opening of the workshop on May 29th was presided by His Excellency Mr Mam Bunheng, Ministry of Health of Cambodia and His Excellency Mr Christian Connan, Ambassador of France, in the presence of the Deputy Director of the General Administration Prevention Medicine of the Ministry of Health of Vietnam, Mr. Tran Thanh Duong. High rank personalities included Ambassadors of Australia, Laos, Sweden and Vietnam, representatives of French Embassies in Thailand and PR China as well as representatives from Cambodian public institutions such as the University of Science and Health, Department of Health in Cambodia.



The opening ceremony was followed by a keynote lecture from Dr Chin-Kei Lee, the Head of the Emerging Disease Surveillance and Response Unit from the Regional Office for the Western Pacific of the World Health Organization.



The event was covered by national television and newspapers. At the press conference, His Excellency Mr Mam Bunheng, the Cambodian Minister of Health, praised this International Symposium for focusing on the strategy to respond to public health threats. He therefore felt this symposium was extremely important and appreciated. He added that the Cambodian Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr Sen Hun, paid particular attention to this issue when A(H1N1)2009 emerged and was grateful to the French Cooperation for its assistance in the development of human resources and materials in the health sector.



Dr Marc Jouan, Secretary General of the IPIN, emphasized that both SISEA and HHS/ASPR projects allowed collecting crucial information on respiratory infections and emerging viruses for health authorities of partner countries in the region. This effort enables regional comparison of data and will prove useful for future surveillance, which is probably the best way to prevent and detect the emergence of the infectious pathogens and to monitor the impact of public health measures.

The representative of World Health Organization (WHO) in Cambodia, M. Pieter Van Maaren, added that this initiative by Institut Pasteur is very important as it reviews the emergence of the infectious diseases in the South-East Asia region with the contribution of leading scientists and policy makers. He underlined the importance of training competent staff to be able to detect and prevent the spread of novel epidemics.



The press conference was closed by Mr. Raul Sotomayor, the representative of CoAg program (Pasteur Institute Cooperative Agreement), which has been funded since 2006 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)/ASPR. He illustrated the success of the cooperation but recognized that continuing education and training of public health staff involved in influenza surveillance activities is still necessary. Therefore, citing the need for further resources, he encouraged that support from a variety of stakeholders should be secured in order to strengthen human capital participation in national health programs related to emerging diseases but also to sustain the skills and competencies of public health workers enabling them to perform in an evolving public health environment..

To conclude, the international symposium contributed to share knowledge since lessons were learnt concerning the set up of surveillance networks and preventive measures applied in collaboration with the respective Ministries of Health. As mentioned above by our honored guest, this international symposium has been helpful to this region of utmost importance to promote further collaborations. Finally a way forward was outlined implicating scientists, health authorities, universities, NGOs and training instances active at the regional level for the benefit of local populations.

A special thanks to the AFD and DHHS for their unflinching support during these years and their invaluable contribution. We also thank our sponsors: IPIN, DKSH, Sanofi Pasteur and Roche for supporting this challenging event.

