



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

*It appears that the well-heeled governments of the world take a very long time to come to the realisation that insufficient spending on medicine leads to horrendous losses down the line. Which tends to substantiate the axiom that cheap things are expensive, more often than not. If a publicly listed company were to adopt similar lines as many countries' governments with regard to finding solutions to important medical problems, one would expect shareholders to stand up on their hind legs and to demand the sacking of members of senior management. And rightly so, too! Today, the world is faced with the possibility of losses in the hundreds of billions of American dollars should there be a pandemic of Avian Influenza, known scientifically as the Virus, designated H5N1, or, in the United States of America, simply as AI. Yet this virus was known to have existed for some years without, seemingly, most people, taking it very seriously. AIDS – **Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome** – was discovered in the early 1980s, and, even up to today, a quarter of a century later, there is, still, not a cure for this deathly virus, which is killing off people on the African Continent by the tens of millions. AIDS is caused by a virus, also, by the way. In 1983, Dr Luc Montagnier and scientists at the Pasteur Institute of Paris, France, isolated what appeared to be a new human retrovirus from the lymph node of a man at risk of developing AIDS. Almost simultaneously, both Dr Robert Gallo's group at the **National Cancer Institute (NCI)**, and a group, headed by Dr Jay Levy at the University of California, San Francisco, isolated a retrovirus from AIDS patients and from people who had had sexual contact with AIDS patients. All three groups had isolated what is now known as **HIV—Human Immunodeficiency Virus**, the aetiological (causative) agent of AIDS. Now, about AI, it was first discovered, positively, in 1997. In December 2003, it was shown to be highly virulent when Cambodia, Indonesia, China, Japan, Laos, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam reported an epizootic (normally absent or infrequent) of highly pathogenic (producing physical disease) Avian Influenza in poultry and various other birds. The diagnosis of the causes of these outbreaks was Influenza A (H5N1). As of February 9, 2004, a total of twenty three laboratories confirmed human cases of AI. Those confirmations were in Thailand and Vietnam and were known to have been responsible for eighteen deaths. Not less than seven deaths were reported in Hongkong in 1997 from what was, then, termed highly pathogenic Influenza A, which is a subtype of H5N1. Also, in 1997, it was known that this subtype had the potential to be airborne and could mutate and, in all likelihood, if precautions to stop its spread were not taken in a timely fashion, it could cause a pandemic. Nothing, however, was done about this potentially deathly virus. In Austin, Texas, however, in June 2004, the Texas Animal Health Commission and the United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service published a circular, warning that migratory birds 'are a natural reservoir for this disease (AI).' The circular continues: 'HPAI (Highly Pathogenic AI) can strike poultry quickly without any warning signs. Once established, the disease can spread rapidly from flock to flock. It is essential for US poultry owners to be alert to this disease threat.' The circular stated that, in early 2004, there had been an outbreak of AI (that is the H5N2 type) at Gonzales, Texas. A fact, printed in bold lettering of this circular, stated: **'Just one gram of contaminated manure can contain enough virus to infect one million birds!'** It is fact, now, that in moderate temperatures, AI viruses can remain viable for long periods of time, and, in frozen produce or in an environment of the frozen North Pole, the viruses can survive, indefinitely. The above facts are frightening, even for me with training as a*

Registered Nurse. More importantly, Avian Influenza has been known to have been with us for some time, but little money had been allocated by responsible governments of the world for its control and eventual eradication. The Hongkong Government is claiming that if one eats chicken meat, it should be well cooked before being ingested in order that it be safe to eat. Also, ingesting frozen pork from an animal that had been infected with a subtype of the H5N1 virus is perfectly safe, provided that the pork is well cooked. The US Government, however, does not appear to agree with this assertion. In short, the Hongkong Government or the US Government is cuckoo. It is apparent that the AI virus can live in frozen food for an indefinite period of time and, if one eats this produce, one is ingesting the virus, also, and, theoretically, it has the ability to kill. One stealth bomber, produced by the American Government, costs one billion American dollars, one is told, officially. It is doubtful that one billion American dollars have been spent on finding an arresting agent for Avian Influenza, which has the ability to wipe out tens of millions of people in the world and to cause an economic catastrophe in the neighbourhood of hundreds of billions of dollars. Is it not time to reconsider our priorities, My Dear Grandchild?

Talk to you next week.

Chief Lady

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