

Deadly 1918 Spanish Flu Virus Reconstructed by US

by The Sunshine Project (2003)

The article below is prophetic. It shows that the U.S. financed the resurrection of the otherwise extinct Spanish flu to justify the development of “new countermeasures” against it. As you read through the articles at PandemicFluOnline, you will note that one name in particular keeps popping up: Dr. Jeffrey Taubenberger. A brief bio of Taubenberger appears at the end of this article.

The “Spanish Flu” influenza virus that killed 20-40 million people in 1918 is currently under reconstruction. Several genes of the extraordinarily lethal 1918 flu virus have been isolated and introduced into contemporary flu strains. These proved to be lethal for mice, while virus constructs with genes from current flu virus types had hardly any effect. These experiments may easily be abused for military purposes, but provide little benefit from a medical or public health point of view.

The 1918 Spanish Flu was highly infectious -- in comparison to contemporary flu viruses -- killing a very high percentage of those infected, including many younger people. The Spanish Flu alone caused the median life expectancy in the U.S. in 1918 to drop by 10 years. Hence, flu viruses are perceived today as a serious biological warfare threat. In Sept., 2003, a \$15 million research grant was awarded in the U.S. to develop protective measures against a bioterrorist attack with flu viruses.

Despite the very dangerous nature of the 1918 virus, efforts to reconstruct it started in the mid 1990s when Dr. Jeffrey Taubenberger from the U.S. Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington, D.C., succeeded in recovering and sequencing fragments of the viral RNA from preserved tissues of 1918 victims. In the current issue of the scientific journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, new genetic details of the 1918 flu virus will be published.

But after (partially) unraveling the genetic sequence of the virus, the scientists went a step further and began bringing the Spanish flu back to life. Unnoticed by the public, they succeeded in creating a live virus containing two 1918 genes that proved to be very lethal in animal experiments. This experiment is only one genetic step away from taking the 1918 demon entirely out of the bottle.

A resuscitation of the Spanish flu is neither necessary nor warranted from a public health point of view. Allegedly, the recent experiments sought to test the efficacy of existing antiviral drugs on the 1918 construct. But there is little need for antiviral drugs against the 1918 strain if the 1918 strain had not been recreated in the first place.

“It simply does not make any scientific sense to create a new threat just to develop new countermeasures against it,” said Jan van Aken, biologist with the Sunshine Project. “Genetic characterization of influenza strains has important biomedical applications. But it is not justifiable to recreate this particularly dangerous eradicated strain that could wreak havoc if released, deliberately or accidentally,” he added.

Construction of new maximum security (BSL-4) laboratories for biodefense research has been justified in part by citing the potential of the Spanish Flu as a biological weapon. Influenza usually requires a low level of containment; but when scientists begin recombining virulence-related genes, the danger dramatically increases. The University of Texas Medical Branch’s BSL-4 plans influenza “gene reassortment” experiments in maximum containment. “This kind of research is creating a vicious circle, and could prompt a race by biodefense scientists to genetic engineer unthinkable diseases,” said Edward Hammond of the Sunshine Project. “What disease comes after influenza? Biodefense laboratories must not become self-fulfilling prophecy centers. The world does not need biodefense programs to create a ‘genetically engineered disease gap.’”

From an arms control perspective it appears to be particularly sensitive if a military research institution embarks on a project that aims at constructing more dangerous pathogens. “If Jeffery Taubenberger worked in a Chinese, Russian or Iranian laboratory, his work might well be seen as the ‘smoking gun’ of an offensive biowarfare program,” said van Aken.

A Sunshine Project briefing paper on the ‘Reconstruction of the Spanish influenza virus’ provides further details and a comprehensive literature list. The paper can be found at www.sunshine-project.org. The Sunshine Project ceased its operations in 2008, but maintains the website as an archive of its work from 2000-2008.

Jeffrey Taubenberger

From Wikipedia:

Jeffrey Taubenberger was born in Germany, the third son of an Army officer. When he was nine he moved to a suburb of Washington, D.C. with his parents after his father was posted at the Pentagon. He completed a combined M.D. (1986) and Ph.D. (1987) at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond in a course designed for students who wanted to follow a career in medical research. For his thesis he studied how stem cells of the bone marrow differentiate into the mature cells of the white blood cell system. In 1988 he began a training to become a pathologist at the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health. In 1993 he was recruited to start a new lab at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP) in order to apply the then current molecular techniques to the Institute’s pathology work. After a year he was promoted to chief of the Division of Molecular Pathology. This included a research lab, where he was free to pursue questions of basic science.

The AFIP forms part of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in the north-east of Washington. It had originally been established by Abraham Lincoln in 1862 to combat

“diseases of the battlefield”. Today, the pathology division acts most of its time as a consultant, giving second opinions free of charge to the military and for a fee to civilian physicians. It handles tens of thousands of cases yearly on the understanding that it may keep a representative sample from any case. In this way it has collected tissue samples of some 2,600,000 people from surgical and autopsy material. They mostly take the form of dice-sized pieces of tissue fixed in formalin and embedded in wax blocks of paraffin. [End wikipedia reference]

A team of "viral pathologists" led by Dr. Jeffrey Taubenberger at Ft. Detrick Maryland began work in 1997 to recreate the 1918 "killer virus," a task that was reportedly accomplished in 2003. In his initial 1997 report, Taubenberger wrote: "The "Spanish" influenza pandemic killed at least 20 million people in 1918-1919, making it the worst infectious pandemic in history. Understanding the origins of the 1918 virus and the basis for its exceptional virulence may aid in the prediction of future influenza pandemics. RNA from a victim of the 1918 pandemic was isolated from a formalin-fixed, paraffin-embedded, lung tissue sample. Nine fragments of viral RNA were sequenced from the coding regions of hemagglutinin, neuraminidase, nucleoprotein, matrix protein 1, and matrix protein 2. The sequences are consistent with a novel H1N1 influenza A virus that incorporate the subgroup of strains that infect humans and swine, as well as the avian subgroup." (*Science* magazine, March 21, 1997, Dr. Jeffrey Taubenberger et. al). See www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/275/5307/179

In other words, Taubenberger and his team resurrected an otherwise extinct “virus” for the purpose of creating a vaccine to counter it.