

Follow the Money...is the Bird Flu Overblown?

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My training when evaluating research data and their findings has always been to "follow the money". One can learn a great deal regarding the lens through which the findings were seen; how outcomes and recommendations may have been influenced by those who funded the study.

Apparently this approach may also help shed some insight on the bird flu scare. Who serves to gain? Here is a scenario that seems to be worth considering.

The H5N1 (bird flu) virus is a disease that was first identified in Italy over a century ago and now occurs worldwide. It has infected 118 people since it emerged in Asia in December 2003, with 62 deaths as a result. Compare this to the number of deaths that occur worldwide *each year* due to the common flu...250,000-500,000.

Although humans lack natural immunity to the bird flu the disease does not readily spread from birds to humans, or humans to humans. The Sept. 29, 2005 New England Journal of Medicine notes that human resistance to the virus is very high.

The biggest danger is the bird droppings. The virus likes moist, dirty conditions. The people who have contracted the bird flu have been poultry farmers mucking about in crowded cages.

The best protection? Detergents. The avian flu virus wall is very sensitive to soap which destroys the outer layer of the virus.

But along comes the proposed savior to hold us over until a vaccine is developed: Tamiflu. Tamiflu is an antiviral drug that was invented in the 1990s at the Gilead laboratory. It prevents the flu virus from exiting the cells in the body once it has infected them, thereby slowing its spread and reducing the severity of symptoms. It doesn't prevent the virus from entering the cell in the first place.

Follow the trail here: hype the possibility, get people unnecessarily scared and recommend that everyone take Tamiflu while charging a hefty fee per dose. People will pay for it through their taxes, insurance or by plopping down the money. But who gains? Roche (the company who now has sole rights on Tamiflu and apparently won't share), Gilead Labs (who invented it) and Donald Rumsfeld (who is chairman of and stock owner in Gilead). Just food for thought. Follow the money.

The good news... the Center for Disease Control (CDC) is at least showing some caution this time around before insisting that people jump on a vaccination

bandwagon. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution writes on October 20, 2005 that the director of the CDC "Gerberding told the business gathering that if avian flu turns out to be a repeat of the 1977 swine flu scare, or if it becomes the medical equivalent of the "millennium bug" that was expected to paralyze the world's computer networks at the end of 1999, the world may ignore and fail to prepare for future pandemics. The swine flu controversy cost the job of Gerberding's predecessor at CDC. The influenza vaccine developed for the virus, and urged upon the public by then-President Gerald Ford, caused paralyzing Guillain-Barre syndrome in more than 500 people, killing 32."

In other words, *the vaccine caused more harm and deaths than the swine flu*. This flu had also been predicted to have the potential of the 1918 pandemic. Its one death in the U.S. was a young man in the military who had left his sick bed to go on a forced march.

Viruses don't play by the rules. They mutate with incredible speed. One strain of the bird flu has already been found to be Tamiflu resistant. The drug itself plays a part in the mutation of the virus into even more virulent forms. Viruses have tremendous survival skills.

The way out? First: relax, stay informed, but don't give into the scare. Secondly: take steps to optimize your immune system. I beat the drum of this every week. Support your body's innate intelligence by giving your immune system the care and nourishment it depends upon to be able to do its job.

Two nutrients specific to the strength of the cell lining, which prevents a virus from being able to invade it in the first place, are: 1) essential fatty acids (ie. fish and flax oils) and 2) the whole vitamin C complex (lemons, limes, citrus fruits, red and green peppers). Choose foods and drink that are life-supporting, nutrient dense and full of enzymatic aliveness. If I may be of help, please call.