Breaking Bad News:
The other Widespread Panic

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"You can't have real newspapers without democracy, and you can't have democracy without newspapers," Alexis de Tocqueville

Time Magazine -1978 to 2001

  - Apple Computer, Genentech, Star Wars, AIDS, John Glenn
- Volcano Cowboys: The Rocky Evolution of a Dangerous Science
- South Asia Bureau Chief 1994-95
- White House: Reagan, Bush, Clinton, and Bush
- Conflict coverage
  - Panama, Gulf War I, Afghanistan (fall of Kabul), Pakistan (Karachi) and Sri Lanka
Outbreak communication

World Health Organization 2001-07

- SARS
- Ebola
- Pneumonia
- Plague
- Marburg
- Anthrax
- Smallpox
- Cholera
- . . . and worse yet to come
Outbreaks: Unique Public Health Events

- **Unfolding** events and true impact may not be known for weeks or months, which leads to speculation and great uncertainty.

- **Unpredictable** and decisions often demanded even while reliable information is limited.

- **Behavior** plays a key role in transmission.

- Socially and economically disruptive, therefore outbreaks have **strong political and geopolitical dimensions**.

- Create **anxiety** in the public, and often in response managers and other decision makers.

- Thus eminently **newsworthy**.
Public Health Enemy #1
H5N1 and Human Influenza Pandemic
9th floor of the Metropole Hotel, 21 February 2003

Each room is indicated by its number (e.g. 911, index case); white numbers indicate affected rooms.

- **Index case**
  - Prof. L.J.L., 63
  - 21 infected

- SARS case
  - With further transmission

- SARS case
  - No further transmission

Air flow (determined by smoke tests)
Schematic diagram of flight CA112

Index case
Mr LSK, 72 from Beijing, China

13 Hong Kong residents; 10 are part of a tour group

4 employees of a Taiwanese engineering firm

1 Singaporean

Uninfected passengers plus 4 infected Chinese (seat numbers not shown)

2 infected crew members; 6 others (not shown)
The first global epidemic of the 21st century

By STEPHEN CLAYTON

A HOSPITAL in China is surrounded by police, officials in the US meet to discuss measures to prevent the spread of the SARS virus, and governments and health authorities are struggling to contain the outbreak. Thousands are thought to have died.

The World Health Organization has declared the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) a global health emergency, and health officials are working to contain the disease. The outbreak has spread to several countries, including the United States, Canada, and South Korea.

The disease is known as SARS, and it is caused by a virus called SARS-CoV. The disease is spread through respiratory droplets, and it can be transmitted from person to person. The symptoms of SARS include fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

The outbreak has caused widespread concern and fear, and it has led to increased scrutiny of travel and trade between countries. The global economy has been affected, and many businesses have been forced to shut down.

The WHO has called on governments around the world to work together to contain the outbreak. The agency has also urged people to take steps to protect themselves, such as washing their hands regularly and avoiding close contact with people who are sick.

The outbreak of SARS is a reminder of the importance of public health and the need for international cooperation. The disease has highlighted the need for better preparedness and response to outbreaks, and it has called for increased investment in research and development of new treatments and vaccines.

In conclusion, the outbreak of SARS is a significant event that has affected people around the world. The global response to the outbreak has demonstrated the need for increased attention to public health, and it has highlighted the importance of international cooperation.

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**THE SUPER SPREADERS**

1. **Patient 1:** First case of SARS in China, identified in November 2002. The patient had traveled to Hong Kong and Guangzhou.

2. **Patient 2:** A 56-year-old man who traveled to Hong Kong and Shanghai.

3. **Patient 3:** A 46-year-old woman who traveled to Hong Kong and Shanghai.

4. **Patient 4:** A 38-year-old woman who traveled to Hong Kong and Shanghai.

5. **Patient 5:** A 40-year-old man who traveled to Hong Kong and Shanghai.

6. **Patient 6:** A 42-year-old woman who traveled to Hong Kong and Shanghai.

These cases demonstrate the importance of travel history in identifying potential sources of infection.
THE TRUTH ABOUT SARS

WHY the virus spreads
China’s COVER-UP
How SCARED should you be?
How honest should we be?

A WHO spokesman said today: "People are not responding to antibiotics or antivirals. It's a highly contagious disease and it's moving by jet. Until we can get a grip on it, I don't see how it will slow down. It's bad."

-- Associated Press (March 17, 2003)
"(T)here has not necessarily been a convergence between scholarly literature, official guide(line)s and actual practices within policy institutions."

BSE Four Country Study (WHO, November 2004)
WHO's Outbreak Communication
Best Practices

1. "The over-arching communication goal during an outbreak is to communicate with the public in ways that build, maintain or restore trust."

2. First Announcement: Trust will be based on the announcement's timing, candor and completeness.

3. Transparency: Transparent communication means communication which is easily understood, complete and free of deceit.

4. Communication Surveillance (Listening)

5. Planning
In other words:

Plan to tell the truth fast and then listen
"While we cannot predict when or if the H5N1 virus might spark a pandemic, we cannot ignore the warning signs," said Dr. Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General.
"Communicating with the public is crucial, and being transparent, speaking the truth and telling the facts are vital in gaining public and global confidence. This approach helped us to gain the confidence of the public, and that does not happen overnight. It takes time and it takes patience. You face a lot of criticism,"

His Excellency Dr Hatem Elgabaly

Minister of Health and Population, Egypt
The Viet Nam Journal:

*The joys of life: to savour what each horizon brings, to offer this to your children, to get excited with new discoveries, to rejoice in sharing. This fills my heart with energy and allows for the work that one does to improve some small corner of the world. This is productive.*

*More than worrying about how much I will earn, I worry about how well I work in the movement towards poverty alleviation and the access to health care for the forgotten.*
Thank You

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Outbreaks: Unique Public Health Events

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- **Unpredictable** and decisions often demanded even while reliable information is limited.
- **Behavior** plays a key role in transmission.
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Working with MOHs
During Human AI Outbreaks

- In countries with newly recognized public health emergency, MOH's first or second request for WHO is for OC assistance
- Direct OC support has been provided to all countries with human H5N1 cases except China
Barriers to OC

- Little existing trust in Ministry of Health or government
- Say nothing and the problem will go away
- Expectations of the public's overreaction
- Concern about economic impact
- Providing unrealistic reassurance, especially initially
- Confidence in the ability to manipulate the press
Barriers to OC/The Response

- Little existing trust in Ministry of Health or government – Egypt
- Say nothing and the problem will go away – Loss of trust is greater and last longer when information is revealed first by another source
- Expectations of the public's overreaction – Public panic rare, but manager's anxiety made be costly
- Concern about economic impact – An outbreak inflicts harm, don't make it worse
- Providing unrealistic reassurance, especially in the first announcements – Common but over-reassurance will undermine trust when surprised
- Confidence in the ability to manipulate the press – International events bring in new reporters
Role of OC Communicators

- Message makers – which now include uncertainties and unknowns, while eliminating over-reassurances

- Public's Representative in Senior Management – feedback the public's concerns into the decision making process

- Advocates for Transparency – who will if not communicators

- Guardians of your Ministry's trust and credibility
Future of WHO's OC

- WHO will continue as leading UN agency speaking publicly on human health issues associated with H5N1
- WHO will continue its training for Ministries of Health, and for journalists.
- Refine tools including the Comms Surveillance, Transparency Decision Tree, Network, and Trust Surveys
- Singapore II – The Operational Guide
Beyond Outbreaks

- OC was built on the understanding that outbreaks had unique characteristics including: Unfolding, unpredictable and created anxiety in response managers.

- New work done on crisis management, especially by Dutch researchers, suggests that these features are common to many types of crises.

- WHO now examining the possibility that OC guidelines would be effective in any public health emergency.
Outbreak Communication

Dick Thompson
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Pandemic and Outbreak Communication
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Activities

- Direct Support to Ministries of Health During Outbreak
- Deployment of Trained Outbreak Communicators
- Training of Trainers -- Workshops run for Ministry of Health officials in over 60 Member States. Proposed FAO.
- Journalists Training -- Pandemic reporting handbook, and workshops
- Coordinate with others, often Unicef, on social mobilization activities. Assessing "outbreak social mobilization" role
Activities

- Tabletop Exercises – Next one set for 26 April for UN
- Two Global Pandemic Communication Meetings
- Establishing Global Communication Network with MOHs, RO, CO and HQ.
- Singapore Two -- The Operational Guide to the Outbreak Guidelines.
Activities

- WHO's daily communications about avian and human pandemic influenza

  - All of WHO's communications on communicable diseases, and especially those about AI/PI, are designed to build or maintain a reservoir of public trust that will be needed in a pandemic.
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WHO Outbreak Communication Guidelines
Components of Trust

The public perception of your:

**Motives**: Are responders acting primarily to protect my health and the health of my family?

**Honesty**: Are the responders holding back or downplaying information?

**Competence**: Are the responders capable of controlling the outbreak?
The most critical of all outbreak communication messages

Secrets and lies in Europe

Mad cow disease is perceived as a British problem. But there are signs that the infection has spread silently across the Continent and may now be about to erupt.

Deborah MacKenzie, Brussels

Before 1996, supermarkets in Brussels that sold British beef would proudly advertise the fact on large signs over their meat counters. Since the scare over mad cow disease put an end to British beef exports, the signs have promoted Belgian beef as a safe alternative — pure and trustworthy, and free from bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

But now there is growing evidence that shoppers in Brussels, and all over Europe, are increasingly buying British goods. The problem is that nobody really knows what they are buying.

In 1999, virtually all caused by infected British feed, Belgium, Austria, Luxembourg, Sweden, Finland and Spain have reported none. Denmark says it has had one case, Italy two and Germany five, though all in cattle imported from Britain. This contrasts oddly with France’s 27 cases, all of which were indigenous and all of which were linked to infected British MBM. The Dutch reported their first two cases this year, apparently also caused by infected British feed.

But the most worrying trend is the rise in cases in Britain, says Marc Savvy, head of animal health research at the French National Centre for Veterinary Studies in Lyon. A French parliamentary inquiry into BSE published in January claims that up to 16,000 tonnes of British MBM were imported every year by France alone before Paris banned it in 1989. Other EU countries imported British MBM until 1994. Accurate trade figures are impossible to obtain, says Savvy, “but we know there is a massive trade in MBM among all European countries. Just the fact that Switzerland has lots of cases caused by British MBM shows there must be others.” Yet France, and now the Netherlands, are the only countries reporting such cases.

Savvy says that many EU countries with
First Announcement

- The most critical of all outbreak communication messages
- Must be early
- Likely to be wrong
Transparency

Ways to improve transparency

- Aim for total candor
- Keep detailed records of decision-making meetings
- Promise and deliver regular briefings
Transparency

- Barriers to Transparency:
  - Weak surveillance can impact accuracy.
  - Real or perceived competing interest (economic vs. public health)
  - Spokespersons or public health officials who are uncomfortable with delivering bad news, or who over-reassure.
  - Communication decision-makers may fear the media will misrepresent bad or uncertain news
  - Concern the public can't tolerate uncertainty or will panic
  - Official belief that if you say nothing, nothing will happen
Communication Surveillance

Evolution of Risk Communication
- Decide and Declare
- Decide and Declare with Evidence
- A conversation with the public
Planning

Need endorsement of senior management and political leaders on:

- first announcements
- limits of transparency
- who will be the spokesperson
Message Making

- Don't over-reassure
- Acknowledge uncertainty
- Share dilemmas (AI's "unknowns")
- Don't over-plan for panic
- Tolerate early over-reactions
- Don't lie or tell half-truths
  - Peter Sandman
  "Recommendations for Crisis Communications"
The Hardest Part

- Doing things that are counterintuitive
- Adjustment reaction
- Trust the public
- Alternative?
- WHO can help
Zanzibar LF Campaign
Zanzibar and LF

- A combination of drugs given once a year stops the parasite from replicating.
- GSK donated 4 billion tablets.
- Mass drug administration, needs 70% of total population.