

Welcome to the 16th issue of *Influenza - Asian Focus*, the official newsletter of the renamed Asia-Pacific Alliance for the Control of Influenza (APACI). Since its establishment in 2002, APACI has continued to highlight the impact of influenza in the Asia-Pacific region and offer guidance on disease control. *Influenza - Asian Focus* plans to continue offering wide-ranging and in-depth coverage of important issues relating to influenza, and to feature articles on new recommendations and recent events relating to influenza and its surveillance, control and prevention.

In this issue of *Influenza - Asian Focus*, Lance Jennings, Chairman of APACI, discusses the upcoming plans of APACI to revamp its name, organisational structure, objectives and activities to reflect its changing approach to reducing the burden of influenza in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, APACI members report on recent national influenza symposia in their respective countries and we also preview APACI's upcoming activities for 2010.

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APACI wishes to alert medical practitioners to a recent warning from Australia about one of the anti-vaccination websites, which patients may be accessing for information about vaccines. The New South Wales Health Care Complaints Commission has issued a public warning about the Australian Vaccination Network (AVN), which is available on the Commission's website at: <http://www.hccc.nsw.gov.au/Publications/Media-Releases/PUBLIC-WARNING-/default.aspx>

APACI Members

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A new influenza alliance for the Asia-Pacific region

***Influenza – Asian Focus* asked Associate Professor Lance Jennings – Chairman of the Asia-Pacific Alliance for the Control of Influenza (APACI), clinical virologist, Canterbury Health Laboratories & Pathology Department, University of Otago, Christchurch, New Zealand – to talk about the new APACI.**

Since 2002, APACI has worked tirelessly in promoting influenza awareness in the Asia-Pacific region, with the intent of improving the prevention and control of influenza. APACI members are highly regarded influenza and infectious disease experts from across the Asia-Pacific region. Members over the past 8 years have contributed towards a number of achievements, including:

- publishing 16 issues of *Influenza – Asian Focus*, a regular newsletter promoting influenza awareness among healthcare professionals in the Asia-Pacific region
- hosting and presenting pertinent clinical data at a number of local clinician workshops/symposia in Taiwan, Indonesia, India and Malaysia
- supporting the establishment and growth of national influenza foundations in India and Indonesia through mutual collaboration and the lending of expertise
- developing and maintaining a website (www.apaci-flu.org) which contains articles, presentations and posters relevant to influenza issues.

APACI is committed to continue working on activities that will help to reduce the burden of influenza in the Asia-Pacific region.

A new legal entity

From 2010, APACI plans to revamp its organisational structure in order to improve transparency and accountability, and to better meet the expectations of corporate responsibility and ethics. In light of this, members are currently at work on the following changes to APACI's structure.

- Establishment as a legal entity (company limited by guarantee, or limited liability company, or society with/without charitable status), by the end of the current year.

- A fixed headquarters in Hong Kong to better serve the Asia-Pacific region.
- APACI will now stand for “**Asia-Pacific Alliance for the Control of Influenza**”, to better reflect our aim of being representative of an alliance of national influenza bodies and technical experts within the region.

Through its new organisational structure, APACI will retain full control over all its activities and published materials. APACI has also revised its mission statement, objectives and activities to better align these with the World Health Organization's (WHO) agenda, and to complement its work in promoting influenza awareness throughout Asia.

APACI's revised mission statement

To reduce the burden of influenza in the Asia-Pacific region

Revised objectives

- To promote awareness of the impact of influenza among healthcare professionals, their professional organisations, patient advocacy groups and the community.
- To be the lead organisation in establishing and providing ongoing support to national influenza foundations and other expert groups.
- To promote best practice in the prevention and treatment of influenza.
- To identify, facilitate and support activities which help to measure and evaluate the burden of disease.
- To support the WHO Global Agenda on Influenza Surveillance and Control.

Revised activities

- Promoting influenza awareness among healthcare professionals in the region:
 - identifying key opinion leaders (KOLs) within the Asia-Pacific region
 - producing a regular newsletter (*Influenza – Asian Focus*)
 - contributing to regional peer-reviewed publications
 - updating the APACI website as a key education and communication platform
 - establishing a presence at regional meetings and symposia in 2010 and 2011.
- Assisting the process of establishing or reviewing country-specific recommendations for influenza prevention and control:
 - identifying gaps in current practice of prevention and treatment of influenza in Asia-Pacific countries, and developing a review article of existing practice guidelines
 - Identifying centres and investigators in the region ready and able to undertake burden of disease studies for influenza.
- Assisting the development of country-specific public awareness programmes:
 - identifying specific countries to help facilitate the formation of influenza-focused groups, and forming an “alliance” with such groups in other countries
 - identifying and linking with countries that are also running successful communications campaigns.
- Exploring and pursuing opportunities for establishing and achieving dialogue with the WHO and international organisations.

Highlights from recent meetings

Indonesian Influenza Foundation (IIF) Symposium; Jakarta, Indonesia, 5-6 June 2010

APACI members Cissy Kartasasmita and Shelley de la Vega joined local and international speakers at this national symposium.



Over 250 clinicians, scientists and public health officials from all major Indonesian cities attended the IIF national symposium: *Influenza current situation and prevention*, to share knowledge on disease prevention, and to further understand the current influenza situation both domestically and abroad. The participants encompassed a wide variety of stakeholders, including Ministry of Health officials, general practitioners, specialists, pathologists, pharmacists and laboratory personnel.

The symposium was formally opened by Indonesia's Minister of Health, Dr Endang Rahayu Sedyaningsih, who also delivered the keynote address. There was also much celebration as the IIF was established as a legal organisation, and as an official partner to the Ministry of Health in its fight against seasonal and pandemic influenza.

During the plenary sessions, a number of speakers shared useful data and insights on the current influenza situation. Of particular note, Professor Tjandra Yoga Aditama, from the Ministry of Health Center for Disease Control (CDC), presented the latest incidence data from

Indonesia's 48 sentinel surveillance sites, while Dr Frank Mahoney from the CDC's Jakarta division gave an overview of the global situation of influenza.

APACI has worked closely with the IIF since its inception in 2008, with committee members attending a number of their meetings as plenary speakers. The ongoing collaboration and scientific exchange between the two organisations will likely continue with an APACI annual general meeting potentially to take place in Indonesia in 2011.

Influenza Foundation of India Conference (IFICON 2010); New Delhi, India, 11-12 June 2010

APACI members Paul Chan and Lance Jennings were among the plenary speakers at this meeting and provided an overview of the conference.

Around 50 clinicians and scientists, representing Delhi and other parts of India, attended the IFICON 2010 meeting to improve their clinical and epidemiological knowledge and awareness of influenza disease. The meeting was organised by the Influenza Foundation of India (IFI), an organisation founded in 2005 to better disseminate scientific information on influenza to the medical community and the lay public in India.

There were a number of highlights during the meeting, the first being the inaugural IFI Oration Lecture by Dr Vishwa Katoch, Director-General of the Indian Council of Medical Research and Secretary to the Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health. Dr Katoch talked about the emerging and re-emerging disease issues that India faced (with a focus on influenza), and on influenza vaccination strategies being followed by the Ministry given that India now has its own vaccine manufacturing capacity.

In another noteworthy session, Professor Deepak Gadkari from the National Institute of Virology reviewed virulence factors of the influenza virus, drawing on his long research experience of the polygenic nature of the virulence of H1N1 1918 and other influenza virus strains. Dr Gadkari pointed out that the pandemic H1N1 2009 virus did not appear to carry any of the known genetic mutations correlated with virulence factors, suggesting there might be other, as yet unidentified, factors associated with increased virulence of certain influenza strains.

Another highlight of the meeting was a lively roundtable debate, which led to the development of an IFI consensus statement on the use of seasonal influenza vaccines for children and adults in India. Issues debated included the lack of scientific data on the real burden of disease in India, the role of private practitioners in vaccination and the need for clear national recommendations.

APACI has had a pivotal role in supporting the formation of the IFI in 2008 through the promotion of APACI's model of influenza awareness education. The group's involvement in IFICON 2010 was in recognition of the need for ongoing regional support for the IFI and its initiatives. Members of APACI have been encouraged to bring together in-country expertise on influenza and establish foundations which can assist the drawing up of guidelines and clinician education programmes on influenza, vaccine and antiviral strategies and pandemic preparedness. The challenge of the future is to ensure sustainability of these initiatives in the face of governments' competing and ever-changing public health priorities.



Flu review

**Lee WJ, Yap J, Cook AR *et al.*
Oseltamivir ring prophylaxis
for containment of 2009 H1N1
influenza outbreaks. *N Engl J
Med* 2010; **362**: 2166–74.**

The use of antiviral ring chemo-prophylaxis in conjunction with prompt identification and isolation of infected persons was effective in reducing the impact of a 2009 H1N1 influenza outbreak in a Singapore

military camp. In this study, researchers observed the results of providing prophylactic antiviral treatment to associates and co-workers of military personnel with confirmed H1N1 influenza.

Of a total of 1175 personnel across four outbreak sites who were at risk of infection, 1100 received oseltamivir prophylaxis. The rate of infection decreased from 6.4% to 0.6% of personnel, before and after the intervention. Molecular analysis found

that all four outbreaks were derived from the same H1N1 isolate, and new cases were due to transmission rather than unrelated occurrences of the infection. There was therefore a significant reduction in the number of new cases attributable to the index case. The authors conclude that the experience offers evidence that aggressive prophylaxis may be justified in order to provide an effective containment measure for influenza in semiclosed or closed communities.

Upcoming meetings

International

International Meeting on Emerging Diseases and Surveillance (IMED)

Vienna, Austria
<http://imed.isid.org/>

4–7 February 2011

4th European Congress of Virology

Lake Como, Italy
www.eurovirology2010.org

7–11 April 2011

Keystone Symposium – Pathogenesis of Influenza: Virus-Host Interactions

Hong Kong SAR, China
www.keystonesymposia.org/meetings/viewMeetings.cfm?MeetingID=1127

23–28 May 2011

4th European Influenza Conference

Malta
www.eswiconference.org

11–14 September 2011

Regional

5th Asian Congress of Pediatric Infectious Diseases (ACPID)

Taipei, Taiwan
www.2010acpid.org

22–26 September 2010

12th Western Pacific Congress on Chemotherapy and Infectious Diseases Singapore (WPCCID)

Singapore
www.wpccid2010.org

2–5 December 2010

Next APACI meeting

APACI will run a satellite symposium during the 12th WPCCID in Singapore on 3 December 2010.

In the next issue ...

- Reports from the OPTIONS conference in Hong Kong
- Highlights from the satellite symposium at the 12th WPCCID in Singapore

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