The Demon in the Freezer
Mofoluwake Adeniyi - Friday, April 12, 2013, 8:59 PM

Hi,

The Demon in the Freezer written by Richard Preston tells us about smallpox and anthrax, certain episodes of these diseases, some moments in the eradication of smallpox, history of smallpox and anthrax terrorism. It also gives examples of roles and actions of epidemiology.

In early October of 1974, 24 cases of smallpox was seen in Bangladesh, Asia. The smallpox eradication program was already in place lead by D.A. Henderson. Though smallpox was nearly eradicated in Asia, the epidemiologists expected an increase in the incidence of smallpox from September to November and predicted an outbreak in December because, smallpox is seasonal, outbreaks increase in dry and cool weather and reduces in warm and moist weather. As a result, eradicators increased vaccination efforts and campaigns. An outbreak occurred in December it reduced in the wet weather till it came to a halt. Smallpox has an incubation period of eleven to fourteen days and everyone in Bangladesh was fourteen days travel time away from one another so D. A. Henderson took active measures to eradicate the virus, he threatened to close ports and put a stop to shipping activities in Bangladesh to stop travelling and prevent people from spreading the virus. He and his team also intensified vaccination and campaign efforts. In November 1975, Stan Foster went to Bhola Island to investigate a case of smallpox. He located the case; a three year old girl named Rahima Banu and called for a team of eradicators to help vaccinate the community. He removed six scabs from Rahima’s legs and feet which were tested by a virologist who confirmed the diagnosis and kept the scabs which was said to have been used for research but some say the scabs are kept in CDC’s reference freezer which contains smallpox strains. The team he called on located contacts (this provided knowledge on who, what and where of the outbreak) which helps epidemiologists decide the steps to take in the event of an outbreak. All exposed persons were vaccinated and eventually, smallpox was eventually eradicated.

Anthrax was reported in October 2001 in the United States. It was properly investigated to confirm the diagnosis and exclude the possibility of Anthrax, Smallpox- virus (Variola) and Ebola-virus particles all fatal diseases coexisting in the letters in which anthrax was found. Sources of contamination like the Hart Senate Office Building were shut done, evacuated and cleaned up to protect the health of the public.

In 2001, after classes in medical school on September 11; I was resting in my room when I saw the headlines in the news. A friend and senior of mine was on vacation in the United States, she called me a week earlier that she had visited the World Trade Center. I was terribly hit by the huge disaster that had occurred. I prayed for the United States. For two weeks we all stayed glued to the news after each day. It was sad. In contrast to my society I was impressed by the attitude of the US citizens they sympathized and empathized with each other. The president of the US personally met with every family struck by the disaster and in 2004 I read the novel “Let’s roll” and I was again immensely touched by the oracle hero Todd Beamer’s bravery and the kindness of Americans, how they supported his widow and children. Never again in the history of this world should a disaster like that happen again. I am bit frightened by terrorism here in Nigeria, the Boko Haram sect is terrorizing
the nation and we Christians are praying for the safety of our families and the nation everyday.
Thanks Mofoluwake