Letters to the Editor

MORE ON THE SWINE FLU AFFAIR

Dr. Edsall (1), in his recent letter to the editor, showed some considerable concern about the report on the swine flu affair by Neustadt and Fineberg (2). Dr. Edsall felt that these authors understated the significance of the 1918 "influenza" pandemic. My reading of their report, on the contrary, leaves little doubt that the hingepin of the swine influenza vaccine decision was the specter of a possible repeat of the 1918–1919 pandemic. It is clear that Crosby's book (3), describing the terrors of that pandemic, was widely available to the leading health administrators and to the Ford Administration (1). One is left with the feeling that there might have been an atmosphere of panic among administrators regarding a repeat of the 1918–1919 pandemic.

The swine flu affair should at least prompt us to reexamine the scientific basis on which this decision was made. How firm are the data establishing swine influenza virus as the cause of the excessive mortality in 1918–1919? Crosby (3) quotes in detail from the reports of the time and notes that the information given suggests that the clinical picture, the season of the year and the ages of those who died were unlike what has been reported for fatal cases of proved influenza virus disease over the last 40 years.

The assumption that a human form of swine influenza virus was prevalent in the era from about 1918 to 1929 rests heavily on evidence for the presence of swine influenza antibodies in those who lived during that era. Yet, how can it be explained that those same antibodies are also widely found in persons born many years after 1929, as shown in studies made during the swine flu vaccine trials (4, 5)?

Clearly, we must reexamine the scientific basis on which rests a most unfortunate decision. We should also reexamine the scientific basis for the inherent promise that the swine flu vaccine would stem the terrible consequences of another swine "influenza" pandemic. Where are the data to support this?

REFERENCES


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RE: "FAMILIAL AGGREGATION OF BLOOD PRESSURE AND WEIGHT IN ADOPTIVE FAMILIES"

The results presented in a recent study by Annest et al. (1) concerning the heritability of body weight in an adoptive population in Montreal differ substantially from the results obtained by us (2) in a nationwide sample of the children of more