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When the next pandemic arrives, will we be ready?

Nov. 15 public lecture at U-M Health System examines local, state and federal interventions likely in the next flu pandemic

ANN ARBOR, MI – Health policy planners give a chilling scenario for what will likely happen in the United States if – or when – the next flu pandemic occurs: it will take up to six months to develop the right preventive vaccine and begin distributing it to the American public. The first round of vaccines will be given to those who are most at risk, so many who want it will be told they have to wait. Panic may be wide-spread.

What can we do in the first critical months, while we wait for pharmaceutical interventions, to reduce the spread of infection?

Howard Markel, M.D., Ph.D., a medical historian at the University of Michigan, has been advising the White House and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on what non-pharmaceutical interventions were effective in the 1918-1920 Spanish Flu pandemic in the United States, and how we can learn to apply these interventions today.

He will discuss his findings on Wednesday, Nov. 15, in the annual Waggoner Lecture on Ethics and Values in Medicine at the University of Michigan Health System. The historical lecture is one of many events commemorating the 100th anniversary of the U-M Department of Psychiatry.

The free public lecture, entitled “Contemplating Pandemics: The Role of Historical Inquiry in Developing Migration Strategies in the 21st Century,” is the 11th in the annual Waggoner Lecture series. It begins at 4 p.m. in the Biomedical Science Research Building Auditorium, 109 Zina Pitcher Place in Ann Arbor. For more information, call (734) 647-8762.

Markel, who is the George E. Wantz Distinguished Professor of the History of Medicine, professor of pediatrics and communicable diseases, and director of the Center for the History of Medicine at the University of Michigan, will describe how he and his team began applying historical and statistical methodology and modeling to look at the largest database of information ever assembled on the 1918-1920 pandemic that is devoted to nonpharmaceutical interventions.

Now funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the CDC, Markel's research involves constructing a worst-case scenario for the pandemic, and a proactive, orchestrated containment strategy for keeping the population out of contact with each other.
"The goal of these proposed migration strategies is to lower the productive rate of the virus in order to reduce the number of people it infects, but unrolling such a strategy would be enormously expensive and potentially devastating to the economy," Markel says.

Markel will be giving a lecture on the history of addictions earlier in the day. It, too, is free and open to the public. Entitled “The Accidental Addict: How doctors like Sigmund Freud and William S. Halstead help give birth to the addict,” the lecture takes place at 10:30 a.m. in the MCHC Auditorium, C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital.

The Waggoner lectureship is named for the late Raymond Waggoner, M.D., who died in June 2000 at the age of 98. He was chair of the U-M Department of Psychiatry for 33 years, from 1937 to 1970. Waggoner was a noted U-M psychiatrist, medical administrator and government adviser who was one of the first to see mental illness as both an emotional and physical problem.

This year, the U-M Department of Psychiatry is celebrating 100 years as an academic medical department. More information on the centennial celebration is available at www.med.umich.edu/psych/centennial .

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