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Hutchinson Advocates Preparedness and Collaboration for Pandemic Threats

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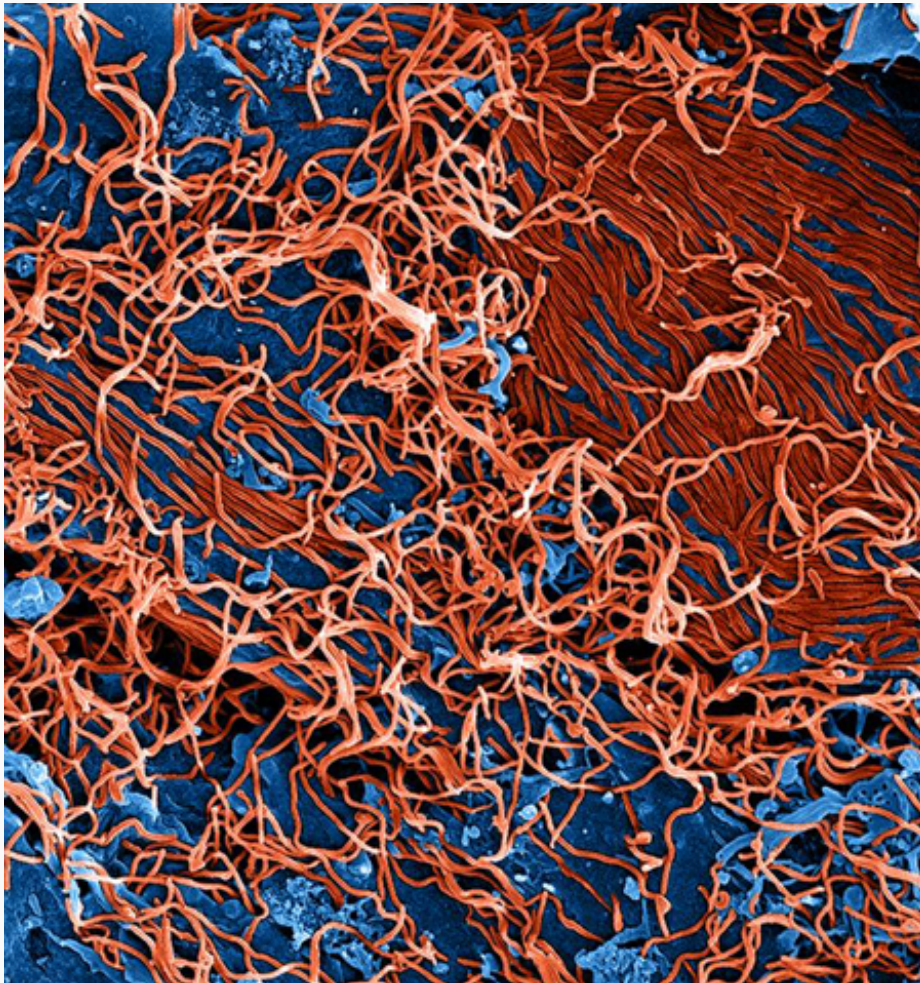
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Ebola Virus

As the Ebola virus plagues West Africa and public health officials brace for its potential spread beyond Africa and possibly to the United States, a September Inspector General audit of the Department of Homeland Security scored the department poorly for its internal pandemic readiness.

Stockpiled antivirals and antibiotics were stored improperly; the agency failed to replenish its medicinal stockpiles and failed to properly assess its future needs before purchasing supplies.

While DHS concurred with the findings, Center for Homeland Defense and Security master's degree alumnus Robert C. Hutchinson believes that there are broader issues concerning the nation's pandemic response planning – greater cooperation between law enforcement and public health sector when preparing for and combating serious public health threats.

"I have always believed that there is a need for greater coordination and collaboration between public health, medical services and law enforcement for an emerging public health threat in the United States," Hutchinson noted. "From the distribution of medical countermeasures to quarantine enforcement to employee preparedness to respond, we may not be as prepared as we need to be for the arrival of an exploding public health threat. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and the Ebola virus may be the most recent wake-up calls to assess these

threats and our intentions.”

In his time off as a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Deputy Special Agent in Charge in Miami, Hutchinson fuses a broader interest in collaboration among the homeland security enterprise with deft writing skills honed through years of research and experience.

His writing focuses on unanticipated pathogenic and biological threats, so-called “Black Swan” events and the need for greater partnership between law enforcement and public when combating those challenges. His articles appear frequently in journals and trade publications and his chosen topics became evermore relevant when MERS, Ebola and other serious viral threats emerged around the world.

“From border control and surveillance to quarantine enforcement, several DHS agencies share the responsibility to support this whole of government mission,” Hutchinson noted. “In the very rarely utilized world of quarantine enforcement, specific DHS personnel have the statutory authority and direction to enforce federal and state quarantine orders.”

Hutchinson’s interest in pandemics and bio-terror were piqued while working in the emergency preparedness unit at ICE headquarters from 2005-07 and serving on several national inter-departmental working groups to develop strategy and policy combating pandemic influenza.

That experience grabbed his interest.

Controversially, perhaps even more so than Hurricane Katrina and the 9/11 attacks, the possible cascading consequences of a serious novel pandemic illness or significant bio-terror event could easily dwarf the impact of a single conventional terrorist attack, Hutchinson argues. This position resulted in many enjoyable and spirited discussions within his cohort at CHDS.

“Homeland security partners at all levels will be responsible for various assignments that they may have never been trained for or even considered in their emergency plans,” he said.

Hutchinson credits his CHDS education in whetting his interest in writing to expand awareness across the numerous sectors within homeland security. His master’s degree thesis, “Enhancing Preparedness Adoption and Compliance in the Federal Law Enforcement Community through Financial Incentives,” was the foundation for his first article for a national emergency management publication.

His foray into academic writing on pandemic-related issues was buttressed after three lecture tours to the Middle East and Germany with CHDS Executive Leaders Program alumnae Sharon Peyus in 2011 and 2012 as a part of a Department of Defense international public health preparedness conference series. The pair discussed policy and collaboration at multi-national gatherings in Jordan, United Arab Emirates and Germany.

“These important conferences confirmed that there was room for improvement for pandemic planning and preparedness around the world,” he said. “The emergence of MERS and re-emergence of the Ebola virus have only confirmed this observation.”

Recent Writings by Robert C. Hutchinson

“[National Strategy for Biosecurity Threats.](#)” Domestic Preparedness, August 20, 2014.

“[International Public Health Concerns – Not So Foreign.](#)” Domestic Preparedness, July 16, 2014.

“[Preparedness & Progress for Emerging Pathogenic Threats.](#)” Domestic Preparedness, March 2014.

[“Pathogenic Threats: Progress and Perils in 2014.”](#) IAEM Bulletin, March 2014.

[“Preparedness Training & Potential Liabilities.”](#) Domestic Preparedness, December 2013.

[“Black Swans – Preparing for Pandemic & Biological Threats.”](#) Domestic Preparedness, November 2013.

[“Are We Prepared for MERS or Another Pandemic?”](#) Emergency Management, June 2013.

[“Are You Prepared for an Emerging Pandemic Threat?”](#) IAEM Bulletin, June 2013.

[“Deliberate Indifference: Is there legal liability for the failure to train and prepare our personnel?”](#) IAEM Bulletin, October 2011.

[“Foreign Pathogenic Threats: Closer Than We Think.”](#) IAEM Bulletin, July 2014.

[Enhancing Preparedness Adoption and Compliance in the Federal Law Enforcement Community Through Financial Incentives.](#) Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2010.

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