



Swine Flu - Déjà Vu

Most of us remember when former President George W. Bush fumbled the old adage, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.” While his “Bushism” brought a few laughs, we are all familiar with the concept and wisdom of this saying; that is, a wise person learns from experience and doesn’t easily fall for the same scam a second time.



Unfortunately, we don’t always learn from our mistakes, and time has a way of clouding our memories. Indeed one has to be old enough to be receiving junk mail from the AARP to remember back to the last time our country fell victim to the “swine flu scam.”

In February of 1976, a few dozen soldiers at Fort Dix, New Jersey, came down with a respiratory virus. One recruit, Pvt. David Lewis, got out of his sick bed to go on a 50-mile forced march. Thirteen miles into the hike, Pvt. Lewis collapsed and the next day he died. A few days later, the CDC announced that he had died of the “swine flu.” The other soldiers at Fort Dix all recovered with no complications, and there were no other reports of swine flu that winter. Nonetheless, by the end of the month, Health, Education and Welfare Secretary, F. David Matthews stated, “There is evidence there will be a major flu epidemic this coming fall. The indication is that we will see a return of the 1918 flu virus that is the most virulent form of the flu. In 1918 a half million Americans died. The projections are that this virus will kill one million Americans in 1976.” With this terrifying prospect being promulgated, President Gerald Ford was persuaded to get behind a plan to vaccinate the entire country against the swine flu.

There were a few problems — first there was no vaccine yet. Second, knowing the potential huge liability of a hurried-up development program and limited testing, the vaccine manufacturers were unwilling to produce vaccine without the taxpayers shouldering the indemnification of any deaths or injuries caused by the vaccine. As usual, our public servants were free with our funds and allocated millions for the vaccine program and gave the vaccine manufacturers protections of liability from lawsuits related to damage done by the swine-flu vaccine.

With tens of millions of dollars profit potential, and no financial risk, the vaccine industry went to work fast-tracking vaccines for the swine flu. The plan was to vaccinate everyone in the country, aiming to achieve a minimum goal of 80 percent of the population vaccinated.

The campaign started with a bang on October 1, 1976, and in just a few weeks over 40 million Americans lined up for the shot. Tragically, in the first week, three elderly Pittsburgh residents died on the same day, all just hours after getting the swine-flu shot. Some in the media suggested that they had died from the vaccine, but the government, and no less an authority than Walter Cronkite, told us — hey, people die all the time, haven’t you ever heard of coincidence? In the next weeks, there were many more reports of deaths, but possibly even more frightening, many vaccinated people were developing neurological conditions such as paralysis, blindness, deafness, seizures, and coma. The name of the



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condition, Guillain-Barré Syndrome, became a household word in the United States, but the government position was that it was quite rare and people should continue to get the shot. Americans weren't convinced, and the lines for the swine-flu shot evaporated.

On December 16, 1976, after 10 weeks and 43 million people vaccinated, the government pulled the vaccine owing to the high number of adverse events related to the shot. Reports from the time (easily available on the Internet) said about 400 were dead and 4,000 had suffered serious neurologic injury. In recent times the government has whittled the number of dead down to 25, but this author is inclined to believe the figures reported in the year or so after the vaccine was given.

Having vaccinated 33 percent of the population, far short of the 80 percent goal, the swine flu must have resulted in many deaths in the 1976-1977 flu season, right? Was it half the projected million deaths? Well, no. Besides Pvt. Lewis (who many believed actually died from dehydration and/or heat stroke), the number of deaths from swine flu was zero, zip, nada, zilch, donut. Outside Fort Dix, the number of non-fatal cases of swine flu was also zero. The take-home message is that in the last swine-flu scam, the vaccinations killed and maimed many, the flu killed no one!

In subsequent articles, we will examine the current H1N1 "swine flu" situation. In the meantime, remember the admonition of George W. Bush: "Fool me once — shame on — shame on you. You fool me, you can't get fooled again."

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