

The 2009 H1N1 Pandemic : Council of Europe (PACE) Report and Testimonies: “Millions Vaccinated for No Good Reason”

Extracts of Statements by Leading Participants at the Public Hearing on "The Handling of the H1N1 Pandemic: More Transparency Needed?", Organised by the Committee on Social, Health and Family Affairs, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), 26 January 2010

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This text was first published in 2010 following the investigation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe into the H1N1 swine flu pandemic.

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“Millions Vaccinated for No Good Reason”

Paul Flynn (United Kingdom, SOC), appointed to prepare a PACE report on this subject, for possible debate in June 2010:

The world has been frightened by a series of health scares – SARS, Avian ‘Flu and now Swine ‘Flu. We now know, in hindsight, that the fears that were aroused do not appear to be justified. So we want to know how decisions on pandemics are taken – are they taken on the best scientific, epidemiological evidence, or are they influenced by other interests? That is the basis of this complaint. With H1N1, did the WHO, once again, frighten the world without any substantial evidence?

Dr Wolfgang Wodarg, medical expert specialising in epidemiology and former Chair of the PACE Sub-committee on Health:

We were told this was a ‘flu which would threaten humanity, and millions would fall ill. This is why millions of dollars of medications were bought. The WHO basically held the trigger for

the pandemic preparedness plans, they had a key role to play in deciding on the pandemic. Around 18 billion dollars was spent on this pandemic worldwide.

“. It was only this change of definition which made it possible to transform a run-of-the-mill ‘flu into a worldwide pandemic – and made it possible for the pharmaceutical industry to transform this opportunity into cash, under contracts which were mainly secret.

Millions were vaccinated for no good reason. It is not even clear that the vaccine had a positive effect, because it was not clinically tested.

In my view, the WHO undertook an incomprehensible action, which cannot be justified by the scientific evidence. The Council of Europe should investigate this to see how WHO can undertake this kind of dangerous nonsense.

Dr Keiji Fukuda, Special Advisor on Pandemic Influenza to the Director-General, World Health Organisation (WHO):

There is much to learn about how the world can improve its handling of such events and a need to separate fact from rhetoric. Again, we welcome this opportunity. ‘Flu viruses mutate constantly and are notoriously unpredictable. History has shown that influenza pandemics can range enormously in their impact, but that it is impossible to accurately predict the eventual impact at the beginning. What is seen early may be very different from what has been experienced by the end. The 1918 influenza pandemic, which killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide, started with relatively mild waves of illness and then evolved into the most severe influenza pandemic in history. The new virus spread with unprecedented speed, reaching 120 countries and territories in about 8 weeks, and now has been reported from virtually all countries.

The H1N1 pandemic is not the same as seasonal influenza and differs in major respects. Large outbreaks occurred outside the usual season for influenza. The virus caused a striking and unusual pattern of severe illness and deaths in younger people, with many deaths caused by viral pneumonia, an especially aggressive form of pneumonia. This pattern is not typically seen during seasonal influenza.

The pandemic is not over, but to date, more than 14,000 laboratory confirmed deaths have been reported. We often see the number of deaths compared with figures from seasonal influenza. This is comparing apples with oranges. Deaths from seasonal influenza are based on statistical models. Deaths from the pandemic have been confirmed one by one through laboratory tests and unquestionably are much lower than the true number.

WHO takes seriously providing independent advice. The ‘flu pandemic policies and responses were not improperly influenced by the pharmaceutical industry. Co-operation with a range of partners, including the private sector, is necessary, but numerous safeguards are in place to avoid conflict of interest.

WHO is confident of the scientific validity of its recommendations. The labelling of the pandemic as “fake” is to ignore recent history and science and to trivialize the deaths of over 14,000 people and the many additional serious illnesses experienced by others.

Dr Luc Hessel, European Vaccine Manufacturers:

The EVM rejects this motion, particularly the accusation of inappropriate response of vaccine manufacturers in their response to H1N1. The vaccine industry did what it was asked to do. The industry's role is to produce safe vaccines in a timely manner and respond to government's requests. It is governed by stringent international health regulations and rigorous safeguards against conflict of interest. Decision-making regarding vaccine needs can only be based on the best available data at the time.

The industry responded quickly effectively and was able to deliver the vaccines ordered by governments. Our industry responded to requests from WHO and governments who wanted to have fast access to a large quantity of vaccines. It is too early to speculate on the overall return for the industry, but in my view the industry has been a responsible and reliable partner.

Pandemic vaccines were properly developed and tested – for the first time in history, vaccines were available shortly after the declaration of a pandemic. This was only possible thanks to a decade of research and development and 60 years of experience.

Professor Dr Ulrich Keil, Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Epidemiology at the University of Munster:

A number of scientists and others are questioning the decision of the WHO to declare an international pandemic. The H1N1 virus is not a new virus, but has been known to us for decades. The H1N1 vaccination campaign was stopped abruptly when it was realised that the effects were milder than anticipated. I am asking for a reconsideration of this pandemic announcement by the WHO.

In Germany, about 10,000 deaths are attributed to seasonal 'flu, especially among older and frail people. Only a very small number of deaths, namely 187, can be attributed to the H1N1 virus in Germany – and many of those are dubious.

The Director General of WHO declared the H1N1 pandemic in June 2009, triggering a cascade of actions by individual countries who were prepared for this by the SARS and Avian 'Flu scares.

We are witnessing a gigantic misallocation of resources in terms of public health. Governments and public health services are wasting huge amounts of money in investing in pandemic diseases whose evidence base is weak.

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