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Surveillance [sər-vālˈəns]

From the French surveiller, “to watch over,” public health surveil-

lance has its roots in 14th-century Europe. In an early form of

surveillance, in approximately 1348, the Venetian Republic appointed

guardians of public health to detect and exclude ships that carried

plague-infected passengers. In 1662, English demographer John Graunt

analyzed the mortality rolls in London and described a system to warn

of the onset and spread of plague. Until the 1950s, “surveillance”

referred to monitoring a person exposed to a disease; the current

concept of surveillance as monitoring disease occurrence in populations

was promoted by Alexander Langmuir of the Communicable Diseases

Center (now the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

Sources

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