About the International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases

Stephen A. Morse
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

More than 2,500 researchers, clinicians, laboratorians, veterinarians, and other public health professionals from all 50 states and more than 70 countries convened in Atlanta on March 8-11, 1998, for the International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases. The conference, organized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, the American Society for Microbiology, and the National Foundation for CDC along with 62 other cosponsors, provided a forum for the exchange of ideas and possible solutions to the problems of new and reemerging infectious diseases, including potential threats presented by bioterrorism. Several agencies and organizations sponsored satellite partnership meetings on March 8 and March 12.

More than 85 sessions (12 plenary sessions, 17 invited panels, 35 poster sessions, and late-breaking abstracts) were presented on surveillance, epidemiology, prevention, and control of emerging infectious diseases, as well as emergency preparedness and response and reemerging or drug-resistant infectious diseases. Topics included foodborne diseases, infectious diseases transmitted by animals and insects, nosocomial infections, infections in immunocompromised patients and persons outside the health-care system, infectious causes of chronic disease, blood safety, host genetics, vaccines, global climate change, and immigration and travel.

In delivering the keynote address, Nobel laureate Joshua Lederberg reviewed the scientific basis for the emergence of infectious diseases. U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala and Assistant Secretary for Health and Surgeon General David Satcher, along with representatives from the World Health Organization, the Pan American Health Organization, and the U.S. Agency for International Development, and representatives from academia and industry addressed the national and international ramifications of emerging infections. In closing the conference, James Hughes, director, National Center for Infectious Diseases, CDC, stressed the importance of building bridges and forging new partnerships to prevent and control the emergence of infections into the next millennium.

In publishing the conference presentations and discussions in this journal, the organizers hope to capture the energy expressed by all participants, further disseminate new information on emerging infections, and stimulate more research and other initiatives against this important public health threat.