

Bioterrorism as a Medical and Public Health Threat

Abstract for Harold Neu Conference

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The threat of bioterrorism, long ignored and denied, has heightened over the past few years. Recent events in Iraq, Japan, and Russia cast an ominous shadow. Two candidate agents are of special concern – smallpox and anthrax. The magnitude of the problems and the gravity of the scenarios associated with release of these organisms have been vividly portrayed in two epidemics of smallpox in Europe during the 1970s and by an accidental release of aerosolized anthrax from a Russian bioweapons facility in 1979. Efforts in the United States to deal with possible incidents involving bioweapons in the civilian sector have only recently begun and have made only limited progress. Only with substantial additional resources at the federal, state and local levels can a credible and meaningful response be mounted. For longer-term solutions, the medical community must educate both the public and policy makers about bioterrorism and build a global consensus condemning its use.

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