

Comment

A Pandemic of Fear and Greed

James Winter

We are now a little more than one week into the so-called swine flu 'pandemic' of 2009. If there's any pandemic about, it's one of fear and greed. News media have filled their pages and newscasts with reports of deaths in Mexico, Texas and (god forbid) even Canada, where one toddler was reported dead on the East coast. Politicians debate a national vaccination program, while shares skyrocket in firms making germ-killing medical masks. Canwest News helps out by prominently featuring a photo of a man wearing a medical mask while waiting at Vancouver Airport for his cousin's return from a vacation in Mexico.¹ The Toronto Stock Exchange is reportedly 'pulled down' by 'swine-flu fears.' Airlines and tour operators suspend trips to Mexico. Airports increase screenings as the virus reportedly infected '13 Canadians in four different provinces.'²

The media manufactured hysteria and then pointed to the solution:

'Until a vaccine is ready, the primary line of defence will be the government's national stockpile of antiviral drugs...Tamiflu and Relenza...[which] some experts believe can prevent infection and slow the spread of a pandemic,' reported Andrew Mayeda of Canwest News Service.³

In 2005, Tamiflu was administered to Japanese children in response to an outbreak of the bird flu. At the time, James Ridgeway wrote in the *Village Voice* that: '... last week Japanese newspapers told how children who were administered Tamiflu went mad and tried to kill themselves by jumping out of windows. In a cautionary statement the FDA noted 12 deaths among children, and said there are reports of psychiatric disturbances, including hallucinations, along with heart and lung disorders.'⁴

For the corporate media, history seldom repeats as previous events have long since disappeared down the memory hole, no longer constituting 'news.' Thus, few recalled what happened in 1976 when there was a previous outbreak of swine flu at the Fort Dix military base in New Jersey. U.S. president Gerald Ford ordered a national vaccination campaign, at a cost of about \$125 million (U.S.). Canada followed suit with free vaccinations, although no cases were reported north of the border. The inoculations were halted in the U.S. after 40 million out of 220 million people were vaccinated. In the end, only one person died of the swine flu, but 500 people contracted Guillain-Barré, a rare paralyzing nerve disease believed to be a side-effect of the vaccine, and more than 30 people died.⁵

In the context of the swine flu hysteria, we need to inquire not only about public safety, but also about who will get rich from the manufactured crisis. For example, in 2005 former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, himself former CEO of drug

company Searle, owned stock in the one company that owns Tamiflu patents—to the tune of at least \$18 million.⁶ So, when media corporations use their power over public opinion to create hysteria, governments then use the hysteria to justify purchasing vaccines which sometimes harm and even kill the public. At the same time, people in government/business such as Rumsfeld and others realize huge profits at the public expense, in a blatant example of fear-mongering, greed and abuse of power.

Big Pharma makes huge profits, using patents, captive and sometimes exclusive markets, MDs, and drug plans. The pharmaceutical industry is a dirty business. They falsify research, risk people's health and lives, use celebrities to push drugs, use medical doctors to push drugs, manufacture nonexistent diseases they can then 'cure,' and try to enlist lifelong patients. Big Pharma revised the cholesterol level guidelines so they could create a 'high cholesterol epidemic,' and profit from Statin drugs which can have serious side effects. But it doesn't stop there. They 'educate' medical students and doctors, provide freebie incentives or bribes such as free vacations to those who prescribe their drugs; they control the release of research results with big bucks and tight contracts. Then, they try to ruin the careers and reputations of MDs and other whistleblowers such as Nancy Olivieri, who defend public safety.⁷

That still isn't the end of the corruption. Big Pharma 'ghostwrites' articles for well-known medical researchers, who put their names on the articles—sometimes without ever seeing the data—in return for payoffs. Of course, these ostensibly 'objective, scientific' articles are published in academic medical journals, and serve to play up the benefits of company drugs, and downplay their problems.

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¹ See 'Taking Precautions', photo and cut-line, page C1, *The Windsor Star*, April 29, 2009.

² Meagan Fitzpatrick, 'Canadian swine flu cases hit 13,' *The Windsor Star*, April 29, 2009. Andrew Mayeda, 'Vaccine debate heats up,' *The Windsor Star*, April 29, 2009. Anonymous, 'Medical-mask stock surges,' *The Windsor Star*, April 29, 2009. Anonymous, 'TSX struggles with swine flu,' *The Windsor Star*, April 29, 2009. Linda Nguyen and Becky Rynor, 'Airlines, tour operators suspend trips to Mexico,' *The Windsor Star*, April 29, 2009.

³ Mayeda, 'Vaccine debate...'

⁴ James Ridgeway, 'Capitalizing on the Flu,' *The Village Voice* November 15, 2005.

⁵ See anonymous, 'The Swine Flu Fiasco,' CBC News Archives, February 21, 1983.

<http://archives.cbc.ca/health/disease/clips/12711/>

⁶ James Ridgeway, 'Swine Flu: Bringing Home the Bacon,' *Mother Jones*, April 27, 2009.

⁷ Cf. James Winter, *Lies The Media Tell Us*, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 2007; Lynn Payer, *Disease-Mongers: How doctors, drug companies and insurers are making you feel sick*, N.Y. Wiley & Sons, 1992; Ray Moynihan and Alan Cassels, *Selling Sickness: How The World's Biggest Pharmaceutical Companies Are Turning Us All Into Patients*, Greystone Books, 2005; Marcia Angell, *The Truth About the Drug Companies: How They Deceive Us and What To Do About It*. John Abramson, *Overdo\$ed America: The Broken Promise of American Medicine*, HarperCollins, N.Y., 2004; Greg Critser, *Generation Rx: How prescription drugs are altering American lives, minds and bodies*, Houghton-Mifflin, Boston, 2005. Jeffrey Robinson, *Prescription Games*, Simon & Schuster, N.Y., 2001.