



## Quotes

*"We must learn from this experience. Otherwise all our sacrifices would have been in vain."*  
Singapore healthcare worker

Most of us would normally be ignorant of the effects of infectious diseases or microbial agents. Partly because in this modern world, infectious diseases appear to be of a trivial risk; instead non-communicable lifestyle diseases like cancer and cardio-vascular hogged the limelight. It is also a modern perception that medical technology is so advanced that effective treatment appears as a mere infectious disease condition.

Despite better public health infrastructure today, the threat of infectious diseases is still significant. In a 1996 global survey by the World Health Organisation, about 52 million people died from different causes. Of these, more than 17 million were killed by infectious diseases.

In today's age of globalisation, there are two main concerns in the arena of infectious diseases. Firstly, that of emerging and re-emerging infections; and secondly the use of infectious agents for terrorism.

The emergence of new infectious diseases and the re-emergence of old ones, invariably in drug-resistant forms, is a growing concern. Factors such as population growth; urban migration; more frequent movement across international boundaries by tourists, workers and immigrants; and changes in the habitats of animals and arthropods that transmit diseases, are just some contributory factors.

In 1997, an avian strain of influenza that had never before infected humans began to kill previously healthy persons in Hong Kong. West Nile Virus, which has its origins from the West Nile district of Uganda, has also emerged in recent years in Europe and North America. Closer to home, a new paramyxovirus, Nipah Virus, caused an outbreak of severe encephalitis affecting 265 patients of which 100 died in West Malaysia, sparking an alarm of spillover into Singapore with attendant concerns of secondary transmission.

The average SAF soldier resides in distinctly "sanitised" environmental conditions, which predisposes to our innate immune system's inability to combat infectious diseases. They are at risk because of overseas deployments and missions in jungles, rural and austere conditions. Diseases such as malaria, dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis, melioidosis, leptospirosis, scrub typhus and filariasis continue to be of concern.

LTC(DR) Gregory Chan,  
Head Preventive Medicine Branch, HQMC at the SAF Medical Corps Workplan Seminar, May 2002, presenting on the "Contrast in the Prevention of Diseases: Bio-defence for the SAF"

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