

We can carry with us organisms capable of causing serious disease and widespread global outbreaks.

Cited!

Dr. Andrew Simor is director of clinical integrative biology at Sunnybrook Research Institute and head of the department of microbiology and the division of infectious diseases at Sunnybrook. He is also a professor in the departments of medicine, and laboratory medicine and pathobiology at the University of Toronto.

Soon after the first case of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) was recognized in Canada in March 2003, Dr. Andrew Simor says he knew that the virus causing this illness was one that he and his colleagues who study infectious diseases had never seen.

“We knew that this was something different, and that we needed to communicate this experience to the broader medical community in as expeditious a manner as possible,” says Simor of the outbreak.

Though SARS originated in Southeast Asia and spread around the world, Toronto was second only to China in terms of the size of the outbreak. Simor and colleagues from Toronto’s Mount Sinai Hospital acted quickly to gather, cull and analyze pertinent data from each of the first 10 cases in Canada.

The researchers contacted editors at *The New England Journal of Medicine*, who wanted to disseminate information about the mysterious illness quickly. Their paper, “Identification of severe acute

respiratory syndrome in Canada,” was published online just two weeks after the World Health Organization issued a global alert about the disease. The paper was the first to describe in detail the clinical symptoms of SARS, and factors related to the incidence and spread of the disease in the early Canadian cases. It has been cited in peer-reviewed journals an impressive 1,205 times since its publication in 2003.*

While the SARS virus and the H1N1 influenza virus are different, Simor says he believes the SARS experience has been very useful in H1N1 pandemic planning.

“We live in an environment that’s so different from that of 20 or 30 years ago in terms of the ease with which we can travel from one part of the world to another. We can carry with us organisms capable of causing serious disease and widespread global outbreaks. This is what happened with SARS, and what we’re currently experiencing with the [H1N1] pandemic,” he says. “Understanding the epidemiology of how infections can spread globally is important and directly relevant to pandemics.”—Alisa Kim

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*Google Scholar, December 7, 2009



DR. ANDREW SIMOR