

Be concerned with the flu?

Now that the flu season has almost ended, at least for this year, do we have to worry about what is to happen in the future?

Although no human has yet had the Bird Flu in this country, this influenza strain has been found in birds in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware and is very similar to that which has killed at least 20 people in Asia.

The Asian Bird Flu, known officially as A(H5NI) has not yet developed into epidemic proportions. Those who have died from this in Asia had direct exposure to the sick



**DR. J.E
BLOCK**

ALL THINGS
MEDICAL

birds. Scientists have known for over 50 years that the flu virus mutates rapidly. If a person with the human flu also becomes affected with the Avian form, the two germs could swap genetic material to create a dangerous new strain. The 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic had Avian origins. Scientists have been reconstructing crucial parts of the virus and recently published in "The Journal of Science" that the key proteins on the viral "gene" were more bird-like than previously suspected.

The Pandemic of 1918 was not an ordinary flue and killed 25 million people worldwide, which conceivably could happen again. In this country, most of that flue was caused by governmental mistakes, as there was crowding of soldiers, and U.S. Commanders continued to send troop ships overseas, turning transport vessels into floating coffins as the virus swept

through the ship.

Whether that flu originally came from abroad (Spain?) or started here is a moot point. The fact is, the virus was a combination of the Bird Flu genes mixed with that of the usual flu, which we just had here recently. Contrary to the recent flu which usually involves older people who naturally have immunosuppression, or young folks who are suppressed because of chronic diseases, the Spanish flu occurred mainly in young people.

Will it happen again? With modern technology, the flu vaccine and antibiotics, I doubt if it ever will. However, because of bureaucratic inadequacies and what happened last season, in which the flu epidemic was quite different than the vaccine that was bureaucratically demanded, there is still a possibility that a mild Pandemic could sweep not only our region, but the country, and even the globe.