

A Journal for Our Times: Launching Emerging Infectious Diseases

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The Public-Health Context

In the United States and more so around the world, infectious diseases pose a serious threat to human health. As society, technology, and the environment change, infectious pathogens arise, evolve, and spread (in old ways and new), challenging existing preventive measures and therapies.¹ New thinking has shed light on the way we view infectious diseases. The diseases are now understood to exist in a continuum, not on the verge of being eliminated but rather in a protean state of constant change, emerging and reemerging within a dynamic, global context. This new insight has called for new approaches, not only for infectious disease prevention and control but also for reaching the public-health community with the message.

Infections whose incidence in humans has increased within the last 2 decades or threatens to increase in the near future have been defined as “emerging”.¹ From 1987 to 1994, the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies published three reports on the state of infectious diseases. The last, *Emerging Infections: Microbial Threats to Health in the United States*, outlined the growing threat of emerging infections and the increased vigilance needed to stay ahead of them.¹ It also provided specific recommendations for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other federal and state agencies to address infectious disease emergence.

To meet the challenge, CDC and its public-health partners focused on expanding and revitalizing long-neglected but

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well-rooted approaches: disease surveillance, applied research, infrastructure rebuilding, and disease prevention and control. Prevention and control efforts included the mandates to rebuild the public-health infrastructure and communicate the global threat of emerging diseases;² these mandates planted the seed of a new journal, *Emerging Infectious Diseases* (www.cdc.gov/eid), the scientific component of a broad communication and education effort against these diseases.

The Publisher

Like all journals, *Emerging Infectious Diseases* has a symbiotic relationship with its publisher. CDC, the agency of the US Public Health Service charged with disease prevention and health promotion, leads national and international efforts against emerging infections—among them AIDS, hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, avian influenza, West Nile virus infection, and severe acute respiratory syndrome. CDC’s efforts encompass improvements in disease surveillance, the public-health infrastructure, and epidemiologic and laboratory training. *Emerging Infectious Diseases* is inextricably linked to CDC’s public-health efforts and is guided by the disease priorities of the agency. However, even as it addresses the agency’s interest in the elusive, continuously evolving, and global nature of emerging infections,

the journal relies on its diverse editorial board, its broad international authorship base, and its independent peer reviewers from all over the world for content that adequately reflects the totality of current knowledge and thought on emerging infectious diseases.

The Mission

In promoting the recognition of new and reemerging infectious diseases and the understanding of factors involved in disease emergence, prevention, and elimination, the journal

1. Investigates factors known to influence emergence: microbial adaptation and change, human demographics and behavior, technology and industry, economic development and land use, and international travel and commerce.
2. Reports laboratory and epidemiologic findings within a broader public-health perspective.
3. Provides swift updates of infectious-disease trends and research: new methods of detecting, characterizing, or subtyping pathogens; developments in antimicrobial drugs, vaccines, and prevention programs; and reports of unusual cases.
4. Publishes reports of interest to researchers in infectious diseases and related sciences and to public-health generalists learning the scientific basis for prevention programs.

5. Encourages insightful analysis and commentary, stimulating global interest in and discussion of issues related to emerging infectious disease.³

Under the definition of *emerging*, the journal examines new infections resulting from changes or evolution of existing organisms, known infections spreading to new geographic areas or populations, previously unrecognized infections appearing in areas undergoing ecologic transformation, and old infections reemerging as a result of antimicrobial resistance in known agents or breakdowns in public-health measures. The journal's scope encompasses all three aspects of the traditional triangle model of disease causation: host, environment, and agent.

In 1995, when *Emerging Infectious Diseases* was launched, the scientific journal market was replete with well-established publications dealing exclusively with infectious diseases (for example, *Journal of Infectious Diseases*, *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, *AIDS*, *Journal of Clinical Microbiology*, and *Infection and Immunity*) or encompassing infectious diseases within their scope (for example, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Lancet*). Moreover, the latter part of the 20th century, termed "the information age", witnessed the proliferation of both print and electronic communication products, many of which did not survive in the long term. One fourth of the "medical sciences" journals started in 1992 have ceased publication (*Ulrichsweb.com* [11 July 2002]).

Why start a new journal? The global threat of emerging infections called for a publication whose sole mission was to address the threat. The public-health need coincided, in the early 1990s, with the entrance onto the publishing scene of electronic communication. New thinking about infectious diseases and new communication capabilities and techniques converged, simultaneously creating and meeting the need for a new publication.

Table 1. Solicited articles published in *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 1995–2002

Year	Issues/yr	Perspectives		Synopsis	
		No. Solic./No. pub. (%)			
1995	4	3/3 (100)	5/7 (71)		
1996	4	5/9 (56)	4/12 (33)		
1997	4	3/8 (38)	6/17 (35)		
1998	4	4/12 (33)	9/17 (53)		
1999	6	3/12 (25)	5/20 (25)		
2000	6	4/14 (29)	1/6 (17)		
2001	6	1/7 (14)	2/10 (20)		
2002	12	2/19 (11)	0/9 (0)		

The Content and the Program

Once the mission had been articulated, efforts to outline the journal's course began. They involved (in addition to assembling the content) formulating, implementing, and maintaining the processes and systems needed to publish a journal, administer its office, and distribute its information all over the world—that is, to take accepted articles to print, on time, in an effective format, to the right audience, in a way that guarantees the impact of the work and visibility of the author, thus encouraging other prominent authors to submit articles to *this* journal instead of to dozens of other relevant journals. As authorship increases, readership and citation increase in an expanding cycle of submission and publication that ultimately produces higher-quality articles and larger circulation.

Some elements involved in establishing a new journal are common to all starting publications; others depend on the type of publication intended. In the case of electronic journals, all elements are tempered by the enormous influence of communication technology. This technology offers unique opportunities for public health because it allows rapid transfer of surveillance, laboratory, epidemiologic, and other data to a broader audience. In turn, public-health data are increasingly demystified, are communicated directly to the public, and are claiming their corner in the marketplace as a public commodity.⁴ However, all beginning journals—public-health or not, electronic or not—raise some questions in common.

How is journal content assembled?

Providing a sound scientific base requires

world-recognized expertise in the chosen discipline. For a new infectious disease publication, knowledge includes modern molecular diagnostic techniques and their usefulness in understanding the epidemiology of infections. That expertise permeates all editorial functions: soliciting original articles on current issues of public-health interest (Table 1), selecting content editors and peer reviewers, appointing editorial-board members, and reviewing articles for scientific integrity and accuracy.

The journal's leadership, headed by the editor-in-chief, establishes long-term scientific goals, constantly defines and refines the journal's mission, and (through thoughtful selection of articles for publication) encourages new scientific hypotheses, approaches, and standards. In infectious diseases, expertise goes beyond focusing on and exploring epidemiologic and laboratory issues; it anticipates future directions of research, recognizes urgent initiatives, and (by accepting preliminary studies as brief communications) encourages investigation in new subjects. Broad knowledge of the field is also required in the resolution of disputes about the propriety of scientific data accepted for publication and in the coordination of the journal's emerging-infections efforts with those of other biomedical and public-health programs.

How is an effective, impartial, and global peer-review process established?

Like many beginning journals, *Emerging Infectious Diseases* began by drafting a peer-review policy, guidelines for reviewers, standard review-request letters, and review forms. For guidance regarding those and many other program-development deci-

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sions (for example, instructions for authors, duplicate publication, conflict of interest, and authorship), the journal turned to principles established by editorial and publishing organizations, such as the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences, the Council of Science Editors, the Society for Scholarly Publishing, and the American Medical Writers Association. Because *Emerging Infectious Diseases* is published by a federal agency, peer review is the means of ensuring broad, impartial, and accurate content. If possible, at least two of three reviewers are selected from outside the agency, and special efforts are made to include international experts. The journal invites authors to recommend qualified reviewers and to name reviewers with possible conflict of interest who should not review. Reviewers are given the authors' names.

The journal's reviewer database is cumulative. As manuscripts arrive, the editor-in-chief, content editors, or members of the editorial board suggest possible reviewers. Suggested reviewers are invited to review; if they agree, their names (and affiliations, contact information, and subjects of expertise) are entered into a database. Reviewers who decline the invitation to review are asked to suggest other reviewers. A call for reviewers is regularly published online and in print. The journal now has more than 3000 reviewers, but the list must continue to grow. Reviewers, who work without compensation, are actively engaged in their fields and in great demand for their opinions, so the number of review requests per year is limited (three to five). An up-to-date, fully searchable database of reviewers, established early in the life of the journal, is a key to smooth peer-review operations.

In 1995 through 1999, peer review was complicated by intermittent e-mail problems (such as corrupted figure files); even through 2001, a few reviews still arrived by fax and had to be retyped or scanned. As journal submissions increased from 17 manuscripts in 1995 to 700 in 2002 (as of November), inviting and tracking reviews, sending reminders, and restarting the process whenever reviews did not materialize

grew into tasks that far exceeded the capabilities of a home-grown reviewer database. The journal is now moving to a Web-based submission and peer-review system that promises to expedite the whole publication process. The system eliminates the need for the journal office to log in manuscripts or send files to reviewers by e-mail. Authors

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log in their manuscripts at submission, and reviewers access manuscripts assigned for review from the journal's Web site. The system provides accurate records (offering limited access to authors for manuscript status) and a fully searchable reviewer database (automating review requests, tracking, and reminders).

How is the envisioned scientific content best presented?

Like any other product, a new journal must carve its own niche in order to survive. It must study the market, survey its needs, and provide a needed service. In 1995, electronic journal publishing was in the concept stage. Traditional peer-reviewed journals moved in a 9- to 12-month cycle from submission to publication, with a bias to reject all but a few well-documented studies, slowly building a venerable, if exclusive, scientific literature. Embargoes and delays were necessary, common, and

accepted. Peer review was shrouded in secrecy. And print ruled.

Emerging Infectious Diseases opted to be inclusive and expansive, as well as accurate, and to use online editing, in-house production, and electronic distribution for faster dissemination of all materials online. Availability of the print version (which follows online publication) would continue as long as demand for print continued. Because its publisher was a federal agency, the journal would be free of copyright restrictions. And because its intent was to reach a broad audience with urgent infectious-disease information, it would be distributed free of charge. *Emerging Infectious Diseases* was intended less as an archive of science and more as a means of communicating science to the interdisciplinary public-health community. The central premises were that global dissemination of emerging disease information was urgent and that the reader was extremely busy.

How is the intended audience defined?

Emerging Infectious Diseases was intended primarily for public-health practitioners (specialists in epidemiology and laboratory science, clinical practice, academic medicine, and industry) working in manifold fields that influence the emergence of infectious diseases (an estimated global audience of 45,000). Those fields include, in addition to the traditional disciplines (infectious diseases, epidemiology, and microbiology), economics, demography, sociology, and ecology. The initial print subscription list (about 3000 subscribers) was drawn from existing CDC distribution lists of public-health professionals at CDC, state health departments, and academic institutions in the United States and around the world. The list expanded to include persons with public-health credentials who sent in subscription requests by fax, telephone, or e-mail. The subscription list is updated, and readers are regularly asked whether they still wish to receive the journal. The list for the print journal now numbers 29,000 including more than 6000 international subscribers.

Whereas in traditional print publishing

Table 2. Articles published in *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, by major category, 1995–2002

Year	Issues/ yr	Perspective No. (%)	Synopsis No. (%)	Dispatch No. (%)	Research* No. (%)	Commentary No. (%)	Conference Presentation No.	Total No.
1995	4	3 (9)	7 (21)	18 (55)	N/A	5 (15)	0	33
1996	4	9 (17)	12 (23)	25 (48)	N/A	6 (12)	0	52
1997	4	8 (10)	17 (21)	26 (32)	N/A	3 (4)	26 (33)	80
1998	4	12 (11)	17 (15)	35 (32)	N/A	3 (3)	43 (39)	110
1999	6	12 (9)	20 (16)	49 (39)	21 (17)	4 (3)	20 (16)	126
2000	6	14 (14)	6 (6)	49 (50)	28 (28)	2 (2)	0	99
2001	6	7 (3)	10 (4)	51 (24)	66 (31)	3 (1)	80 (37)	218
2002	12	19 (7)	9 (3)	77 (28)	157 (58)	2 (1)	8 (3)	272

*Introduced in 1999.

the audience is narrowly defined, narrow definitions are unrealistic in electronic publishing. The intended audience is not the only audience. Ease of access to the information on the Web broadens the audience in unanticipated ways. And whereas a print journal assumes a light spillover of scientific or technical information to the public through the mass media, an electronic product must actively take into account a nonprofessional general audience. The wider audience includes patients seeking direct information about illnesses and their treatment, students and research assistants whose first impulse is to turn to the Web for information, continuing education candidates, and a largely unserved, multifaceted international audience. In addition to visits from regular subscribers, the journal Web page receives hundreds of thousands of hits per month (CDC Web statistics, March 2002).

What format and style most appropriately showcase the content?

As *Emerging Infectious Diseases* has grown, the diverse composition of its audience has influenced both its content and its format. The content features review articles (Perspectives and Synopsis) and research articles (Table 2). Review articles include insightful analysis and commentary (“Here is what we found, and here is what the findings mean to public health”). They are compact (no more than 3500 words) and address the needs of the generalist by providing detailed scientific data in



Figure 1

appendixes, figure legends, and footnotes or only online (with URL included in the print version). This format, which allows a smoother flow of information, provides detailed data for those who want them but remains accessible to multiple audiences. Research articles, which are encouraged to include multiple subheadings and illustrations, are also brief (no more than 3500 words) and scrutinized for readability.

A strictly technical or scientific journal audience knows specialized terminology, tolerates extensive jargon, deciphers cryptic abbreviations, plows through a sea of acronyms and even a not-so-clear structure, and reads between the lines for missing explanations. A multidisciplinary audience requires definitions, explanations, and clarifications. As a result, substantive editing of submitted articles is required. As

articles are edited for a multidisciplinary audience, they improve in clarity and effectiveness for all audiences. To further address the needs of a broader audience, the journal publishes brief communications (Dispatches of no more than 1500 words and Commentary [Table 2]) and has introduced articles (Another Dimension) that actively discuss the human aspects of scientific research.^{5,6} Art is used on the cover to “humanize” the technical content (Figure 1) and remind the reader that “in the end, the purpose of all scientific endeavor is the betterment of humanity and the improvement of the quality of life for all people.”³

Which databases index a new journal first?

The sooner a new journal is indexed, the sooner readers and authors will find it. Many databases index journals after only a general screening. Others (such as *Index Medicus*/MEDLINE, the Library of Medicine’s database) have specific indexing requirements (for example, that a journal come out regularly and on time). Indexing increases journal citation, and citation is a measure of a journal’s effectiveness in reaching readers. *Emerging Infectious Diseases* was first indexed in *Current Contents* (1995) and several electronic databases before being indexed in *Index Medicus*/MEDLINE (1996).

How does a new journal office function?

The administrative course of a journal is usually led by the managing editor, who

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uses publishing, communication, and managerial principles to coordinate its multilayered team of authors, peer reviewers, the editor-in-chief and scientific-content editors, the editorial board, and the journal office. The authors submitting manuscripts, the peer reviewers, the editor-in-chief and scientific-content editors assessing the integrity and accuracy of the manuscripts, and the members of the editorial board serving in an advisory capacity are all over the world. In a year with 700 manuscript submissions, the journal engages more than 2000 content experts in a publishing process that involves frequent personal interactions.

The journal office (Figure 2) links all components of the journal team through editorial and production activities. During the editorial process, various levels of editing are used, from substantive editing (particularly of manuscripts from non-English-speaking authors) to final proofreading on the Web. Accepted manuscripts are assessed for suitability of publication in a particular style category (such as Perspectives, Synopsis, and Research), for effectiveness of tables and illustrations, and for sections suitable for online-only publication. Manuscripts are edited for grammatical correctness, journal style, clarity, coherence, and brevity according to current editorial conventions and an in-house style manual (www.cdc.gov/ncidod/eid/style_guide.htm). Editing is done online (Microsoft Word customized with symbols and accents to facilitate processing of tables, text, typesetting tags, and conversion to HTML and PDF). Edited manuscripts are sent to authors without redlining (in PDF format) and with instructions to make only changes needed for accuracy and correctness. Authors' changes are entered, and references are verified. Copyeditors follow assigned manuscripts from submission through peer review, acceptance, publication, and electronic distribution.

Production activities take the edited content through desktop publishing (FrameMaker) to Web distribution (DreamWeaver). Production includes linking references, converting materials to

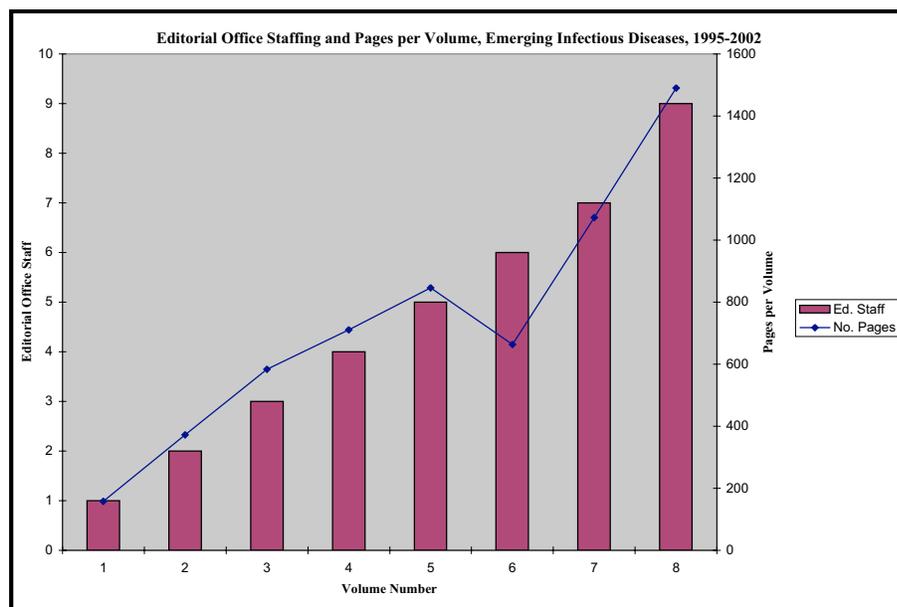


Figure 2. In 1995 through 1996, *Emerging Infectious Diseases* was part of the activities of the Publications Office, National Center for Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and had no specifically allocated staff. In 2002, the nine-member staff included a managing editor, four copyeditors, three desktop-publishing-production-Web editors, and one editorial assistant.

HTML and PDF formats for online publication, and adding XML tags for inclusion in the National Library of Medicine's PubMed database. HTML conversion allows speedy publication of all articles online ahead of print and incrementally (an article at a time as editing and production are completed). HTML is compatible with all browsers on all platforms, creates a small file, is fast to upload and download, and is easy to hyperlink, thus supporting the journal's goal of rapid and wide dissemination. Electronic files for each issue, all of which have been available for several weeks in HTML, are sent to the printer in PDF format, and the issue is available online in both formats 2 to 3 weeks ahead of the print issue. Online-only publication, which can be cited in the print text, makes possible the posting of extensive indexes, appendixes, and other technical information for the specialist. It also allows last-minute posting of time-limited announcements and other information not included in the print version. Online-only publication has extensive potential (for example,

in creating a section—or a completely separate publication—of articles published only online) and continues to evolve.

The journal's publishing and communication course also comprises human-resources issues, including coordination of contract, permanent, and offsite employee activities and conflict resolution (for example, between authors and copyeditors when authors dispute editorial changes, between editors about editorial style, and between editorial and production staff debating the flow and distribution of work or applications of editing and other software). Business, subscription, and journal-promotion activities are also part of the course. The deadline-mandated schedule and the evolving nature of electronic publishing with its multiple technologic options require adaptable staff and flexible management.

What is the influence of electronic technology? Electronic technology (the subject of many forums and articles) is a leading factor in the development of a new journal, from

initial soliciting of articles and reviews to online editing, production, and distribution of articles. Moreover, electronic distribution over the Internet has changed the relationship between journal and audience. In print journals, readers respond to reports by writing letters to the editor expressing opposing views. At the end of each electronically published article, the reader is invited to comment (to the editor or to the author) about the article. The communication is fast, easy, and direct; if deemed of general interest, it is published as a letter to the editor. Authors writing for traditional print journals rarely expect more than a few letters in response to an article. In electronic journals, wide response is expected and immediate. The author of an article on bovine spongiform encephalopathy (*Emerg Infect Dis* Vol. 7, No. 1, Jan-Feb 2001) received more than 100 responses in the week after online publication of his article (Eideditor e-mail archive).

Speed is the foremost advantage of electronic publishing—not speed that replaces quality, but speed that eliminates obstacles to distribution, improves quality, and offers unprecedented search capability. After peer review (itself expedited by electronic communication by e-mail or the Internet), the combination of editing online, in-house desktop publishing, and posting of an HTML version of the article online makes possible an acceptance-to-publication time of 4 to 6 weeks (online) or 6 to 8 weeks (print). Articles of urgent public-health content can be further expedited. For example, information on the first 10 cases of intentional anthrax in the United States was peer-reviewed, edited, and published online within 5 days of submission to ensure that clinicians had the diagnostic information needed to recognize contemporaneous cases.⁷

Electronic processing can improve the quality of text by extending opportunities for updates and corrections. Pages published in HTML “ahead of print” can be corrected—if the errors are factual and serious (electronic pages reflect date

of correction). If a serious error is found (or a worthwhile scientific development occurs) after files are sent to the printer, electronic files can be corrected in-house and resent to the printer at a lower cost than if the printer had to make the correction. Quality improvements in the format of the journal can be easily made as soon as they are identified. Finally, even dedicated print readers search electronic versions of journals when available because the search is easier and faster and offers multiple links to relevant materials.

The Future

At inception, *Emerging Infectious Diseases* was a quarterly, primarily electronic journal, with 40 pages per issue, also distributed in print to 3000 subscribers. Now in its ninth year, the journal is a monthly publication with more than 50,000 subscribers (print and online) in more than 100 countries. The journal reaches nearly all its intended audience of public-health professionals and has a high impact factor (third-most-cited infectious disease journal, *ISI Citation Reports*, 2001). Increasing print-distribution requests indicate that the end of the print journal is not near. Parts of *Emerging Infectious Diseases* are translated (at no cost to CDC) into Spanish, French, Chinese, and Japanese through partnerships with academic and other programs abroad. The translations are facilitated by the availability of electronic files and the public-domain nature of the journal’s content.

As electronic publishing continues to change the publishing scene, a young and growing journal must continue to ask new questions:

- How do we fully exploit the increasing number of electronic tools to provide added advantages, improve interaction with our audience, and enhance online services? New tools such as XML promise to further improve how articles are published online by making laborious indexing of journal materials obsolete and simplifying the process of making scientific information available to

diverse audiences. Automated alert systems are already used by some journals to let segments of their audiences know when articles of special interest to them have been published. Other tools such as animation and interactive features are also used by journals that have the technologic capacity to support them.

- How do we continue to refine our editorial and production activities for a higher-quality publication and at the same time maintain comfortable working conditions in a deadline-driven process? Electronic tools will continue to improve the editorial and production processes and provide more links to online resources. The challenge will be to keep editorial office operations and editorial and production staff current.
- How do we balance reader demand for instant dissemination of scientific data with rigorous peer review for scientific quality and integrity? Some journals post articles online as soon as peer review is completed. The reader is alerted to use these “prepublished” materials with caution because they will be edited and may change in content and in format. Although “prepublication” responds to the audience’s need for immediate information, it involves risks for the audience and for the journal that publishes information before full quality control has been completed. It may also place pressure on authors to provide better-quality “revised-after-review” submissions. In another innovation, some journals provide completely open peer review online, which promotes scientific discourse and broad scrutiny of new data. Those innovations challenge electronic journals to remain open to options and relevant to audiences.

Emerging Infectious Diseases continues to track developments in genomics, bacterial pathogenesis, public-health implications of the causes and effects of amphibian population declines, the role of migratory birds in the spread of West Nile virus, infections in the health-care setting, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, the use of *Bacillus anthra-*

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cis in recent bioterrorism attacks, and other infectious disease issues. Amid continuous change (the journal's theme and driving force—reflected in the changing colors of its logo), one element remains constant: the public-health mission and its guiding principle to communicate effectively the undiminished potential for global emergence of infectious agents and the need for public-health vigilance.

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The Journal's Role in Scientific Misconduct

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At this educational retreat, participants will have a chance to explore the ethical, legal, and pragmatic implications of scientific misconduct with publishers, editors, and managers of scientific journals, members of the academic community, representatives of oversight agencies, and other experts. For more information, watch the CSE Web site, www.CouncilScienceEditors.org.