

Plenary Address: Protecting the Public's Health: What Can You Do About It?

Speaker:

Tanja Popovic
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Prevention
Atlanta, Georgia

Reporter:

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Tanja Popovic, associate director for science, Office of Chief of Science, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), began by talking briefly about the new CDC, its health-protection goals, achieving an impact on health and measuring the CDC's impact, and the communication of science and the science of communication. What would CDC like to see done in light of these goals? Why does CDC do what it does? In brief, Popovic stated that health should be "a fundamental resource for unencumbered and joyful living".

CDC, said Popovic, is active in epidemiologic and research work throughout the world. Investigators at CDC are "disease detectives"; they investigate disease outbreaks in the United States, and they give international outbreak assistance, if invited. CDC investigators are stationed in more than 50 sites.

Emerging public-health threats, globalization, research into the human genome, our aging society, and changing demographics all indicate that CDC must change. Three of CDC's strategic imperatives are to have a health impact, to pursue public-health research, and to have a global health impact. To enable CDC to achieve those goals, Congress had approved CDC's reorganization 5 weeks before Popovic spoke at the CSE annual meeting. Now reporting to the Office of the Director is the Coordinating Center for Health Information and Service. It is with this center that CSE members would

mostly communicate. The center is the "face" of CDC to its customers. Popovic emphasized the importance of the scientific community and the speed with which CDC would communicate with it. CDC might be changing, but not the science, which remains the cornerstone of all CDC activities.

Achieving maximal health impact is a driving force at CDC. CDC not only expects to protect the population from biotreats and other hazards but also is working in the promotion of health and

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disease prevention. Specific goals are proposed for each life stage, but the four priorities or "trailblazers" are obesity, adolescent health, influenza, and preparedness for biotreat events. CDC research is aligned with this mission and supports the health-protection goals.

In supporting the CDC imperatives, CDC policy and regulatory issues will be concerned with extramural research peer review, intramural peer review, open-access publishing, innovative use of the Internet, and service to authors and readers. With the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, weekly surveillance updates will continue to be available, as well as a health alert network and the secure and rapid exchange of information. Popovic envisions no major changes in CDC publications but looks for the integration of science and information



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Tanja Popovic

and a broader spectrum of coverage.

What can CSE do to help? Popovic encouraged everyone to work together in a transdisciplinary manner. At CDC, the silos are being broken down to be more effective in this transdisciplinary manner. CSE members can help increase the impact of science on public health, move beyond the immediate cause of disease, and work with the political will, the infrastructure, and the scientific base. They can look into participatory and community-based research and study designs other than the randomized controlled trial. They can "involve the folks whom you are studying up front". In editorials, they can explain and clarify complex health issues. They can encourage a transdisciplinary partnership among journals. And possibly they can devote in-depth editions to complex topics.

Popovic urged us to work closely together. Why do we do what we do in public health? We started by counting the dead; then we counted the ill; and now we are focusing on protecting people's health and improving their quality of life. 🌱