

Epidemic Next Door: The SARS Experience In Toronto

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An Overview of the Toronto Outbreak

February 23, 2003 to April 18, 2003

May 22, 2003 to June 11, 2003

- Background
- Provincial Emergency Declared March 26
- Number of Individuals Isolated: 13,000+
- Number of Contacts Followed Up:
23,000+
- Number of Deaths: 44 (38 in Toronto)

The Overview Cont'd

- Hotline Calls: 300,000 with a peak of 47,567 in one day
- Number of section 22 Orders Served: 27
- Number of Section 35 Applications: 0
- Number of Appeals: 1 (later withdrawn)
- Financial Costs: \$5.9 million
- SARS Investigation: June 10, 2003

Public Health Legal Framework

- Province of Ontario
- Health Units
- Legislation

Health Protection and Promotion Act

- Section 22
- Section 35
- Regulations: Disease Specifications
- Mandatory Reporting: HPPA/PHA
- Appeal Provisions

Ethical Issues: Finding the Balance

- Balancing individual freedoms against the common good; the ethics of quarantine
- Balancing the protection of privacy and the public's 'right' to know
- Balancing the duty to provide care and the fear for personal safety
- Balancing the needs of SARS patients with the interests of patients in need of urgent medical treatment

Privacy Considerations

- Should name of Index case be disclosed?
- Should name of transit rider be disclosed?
- Should names on Quarantine List/cases be disclosed to hospital? To school officials?
- Should names be disclosed to Call Centre?
- Confidentiality Agreements

Legal Tools Applied During SARS Outbreak

- MOH Orders: Compulsory Isolation of Individuals/ “Class” of Persons
- Court Orders (not used in Toronto)
- Mandatory Reporting Requirements: HPPA and PHA
- Voluntary Isolation
- Work Quarantine

SARS Recovery Strategy

- SARS Assistance and Recovery Strategy Act, 2003. Received Royal Assent May 5, 2003
- SARS Emergency Leave: Conditions, Reinstatement, Reprisals

Provincial Investigation

- Health Protection and Promotion Act: s.78
- June 10, 2003 appointment of Mr. Justice Campbell
- Terms of Reference
- Public Reports
- www.sarscommission.ca

Legislative Amendments: Post SARS

- Detention Provisions
- Class Orders
- Appointment of Chief Medical Officer of Health by Legislative Assembly/Annual Report
- Possessing Premises for use as temporary isolation facility
- Mandatory Reporting Regulation

Preparedness Checklist

- Templates: Orders, Court Materials, Confidentiality/Records Agreements
- Key Contacts List/On Call Roster (24/7)
- Court Access/Police Co-operation
- Protocols for Call Centres, Funerals and Funeral Homes, Court Applications
- Process Servers
- Communications Strategy

Preparedness Checklist cont'd

- Flexible and Robust IT System
- Medical Staff Recruitment
- Trained CD Investigators
- Strong Community Partnerships:
hospitals, police, community agencies
- Isolation facilities

Impact of the Outbreak

- exposed vulnerabilities and created opportunities
- illustrated how vital public health is to the well being of the City
- reconfirmed that balancing individual rights against the common good is a challenge
- gave rise to extraordinary human courage, dedication and commitment

Learning From SARS: Final Thoughts

- Manage the Risk:
 - Communicate-Remember, everyone involved needs timely access to the right information
 - Co-operate-Make use of available resources, both internal and external to your organization
 - Co-ordinate-Identify and clearly understand the roles and responsibilities of those involved
 - Collaborate-Think of the law as an enabler not a barrier to sharing information