

Western Pacific Surveillance and Response: a journal to reflect the needs of our Region

Emma Field^a and Takeshi Kasai^a

The *Western Pacific Surveillance and Response* (WPSAR) Journal was established to encourage countries in the Western Pacific Region to share information on the surveillance of and response to public health events specific to this Region. An important step in surveillance is the dissemination of results to stakeholders, and, in the current international environment, public health events in one country may be of interest to the Region or even globally. In recent years many countries in the Western Pacific Region have increased capacity in surveillance and response through the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases to meet the core capacity requirements of the International Health Regulations (2005), also known as IHR (2005).^{1,2} There is now an opportunity to encourage sharing of information as a result of these improvements.

While IHR (2005) is a mechanism for confidentially sharing information on public health events of international concern, there is no mechanism for widely disseminating information on surveillance and response activities. Biomedical journals, which are the usual avenue for information dissemination, prefer to publish rigorous research studies. This tendency provides a challenge for publishing information useful for surveillance of and response to public health events such as surveillance reports. Recommendations from the meeting of the National Influenza Centres and the consultation of the technical advisory group for emerging diseases highlighted the need for improving information sharing in the Region and to develop a mechanism to facilitate this sharing.^{3,4} Further evidence highlighting the need for a publication for the Western Pacific Region was demonstrated during the 2009 pandemic when authors in the Western Pacific Region published surveillance reports in the European-focused journal, *Eurosurveillance*.⁵

In addition to encouraging information sharing, WPSAR aims to engage the trainees of field epidemiology

programmes. In recent years, field epidemiology training programmes (FETPs) have been established or expanded in the Region. Critical analyses of surveillance data, evaluations of surveillance systems, outbreak investigations and evaluations of public health interventions are important parts of these programmes. WPSAR will be a platform for publishing such reports, therefore acting as a catalyst for building capacity in this area. Through the process of preparing a manuscript, and the subsequent peer review and editing of the manuscript, trainees will have an opportunity to improve their understanding of their work.

These goals of WPSAR differ from those of other biomedical journals and the editorial policy and structure of the journal reflect these goals. While the editorial team encourages research articles on routine public health events such as outbreak investigations, there is also an opportunity for more informal articles such as lessons from the field and risk assessments.

The “Lessons from the Field” style article was introduced into the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* in 2005 to provide an avenue for publishing evaluations of public health interventions that do not meet the criteria of a research paper.⁶ Similarly in WPSAR, “Lessons from the Field” articles are designed to document the solutions to problems identified in the field that would otherwise have limited opportunity for wide publication. Many countries in the Region face similar challenges and therefore can learn from the experiences of other countries.

WPSAR will also publish risk assessments. A risk assessment is the systematic organization of information to determine a risk from a threat. The Western Pacific Regional Office has identified building risk assessment capacity as a priority and recently conducted several training workshops in the Region. Risk assessments for public health events often have to be conducted in short time frames with limited information but are necessary

^a World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific, Manila, Philippines.
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to help guide decision-making for public health action. When countries are faced with a public health event that could spread internationally, publishing a risk assessment would be beneficial for the Region.

The WPSAR editorial team looks forward to working with readers, authors and reviewers to create a journal that is a hub for information sharing and is supportive of developing capacity for surveillance of and response to public health events. We welcome suggestions and feedback to assist with the evolution of WPSAR to ensure the journal always reflects the needs of our Region.

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