

Plans for EU disease control centre given boost

The proposal to create a European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)* has been given a boost by the presence of global health threats such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and West Nile virus, says an editorial in *Science*.

The plan has been backed by the European Commission (EC), and awaits approval by the European Parliament. The ECDC would allow the coordination of more effective responses to emerging threats from communicable diseases among the 15 national public health systems, contends the editorial. Until recently, the idea of a virtual "*network of networks*" was favoured over an actual physical centre, the editorial continues; however, the anthrax scare and SARS has driven home the "*importance of speed in dealing with public health threats*". Indeed, "*this center needs an address, a head, experts*", contends the head of French public health institute InVS, Giles Brückner.

Currently, the plan involves a staff of around 100 individuals and initial funding of about \$US6.4 million for 2005, increasing to \$US33.4 million in 2007. This outlay seems "*ludicrously small*" relative to the US CDC's** staff of 8500 and annual budget of \$US6.5 billion, comments the editorial. However, according to head of the EC's communicable diseases unit Ronald Haigh, "*most of the surveillance network and expertise already exists and is paid for by member states*".

* see PharmacoEconomics & Outcomes News 384: 11, 12 October 2002; 800901805

** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Weiss G. European Union plans for its own CDC. *Science* 301: 581, No. 5633, 1 Aug 2003 800943255