

Research
Health professionals findings
March 2005 -



Awareness and knowledge of pandemic flu

- **Varied widely** across sample:

- HPA Comms Leads, CCDCs and Immunisation Co-ordinators were very aware and involved in planning for the situation
- low level awareness and limited knowledge amongst GPs, District Nurses, Community Pharmacists and A & E Consultants

“I’ve read about Asian Flu in the papers and one article in a pharmaceutical journal” (Community Pharmacist)

“We’re dealing with priorities on a day to day basis – little known about this” (A & E Consultant)

Importance of communication

- All respondents **supported communication on this issue**, specifically for frontline health professionals
- Building **awareness amongst health professionals** was considered a priority:
 - references to SARS video
 - alerts/updates on NHS websites accessed



Importance of communication (2)

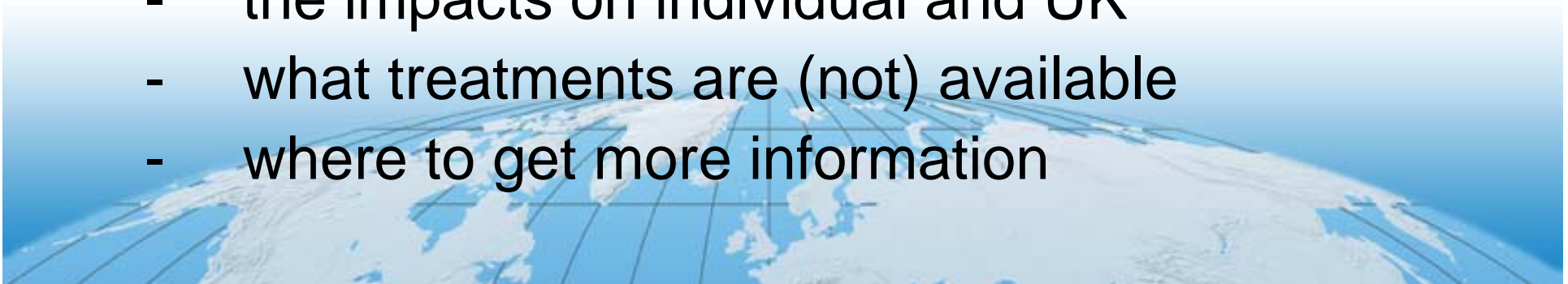
- **Communication with the public** needs to be carefully considered – panic leading to immediate demand on services a big concern, particularly for GPs and Community Pharmacists
 - some feel short-term “panic” is worthwhile
 - others thought “less is more” – principle should be pursued

“I’ll have a line of people at my surgery – all convinced they have pandemic flu” (GP)



Current pandemic flu leaflet

- A majority of health professionals thought that **the leaflet was clear and simple**, the comparison page received a lot of praise
- The **key messages** conveyed were:
 - what pandemic flu is
 - how it starts/likelihood of reaching UK
 - how it differs from “normal” flu
 - why it is thought to be coming
 - the impacts on individual and UK
 - what treatments are (not) available
 - where to get more information



At the outset of a pandemic

- Respondents discussed the **need for consistent, regular communications with the general public** backed-up with clear guidelines for service providers
- Respondents **focused on the following messages:**
 - who is in control of the situation
 - what the public can do/their responsibility



At the outset of a pandemic (2)

“...misuse of services will be an issue, we will need to be direct and clear and provide step-by-step alternatives through helplines, interactive websites, local newspapers” (CCDC)

- how to limit spread, re-emphasising hygiene measures and containment
- symptoms and what to do if concerned
- vaccine situation, emphasise difference with antivirals and development rather than lack of a vaccine



Conclusions

General public findings:

- **Many challenges** face the communication strategy on pandemic flu but the findings of this research indicate that the process must begin:
 - the general public have limited understanding of the threat posed by pandemic flu



Conclusions (2)

- **Health professionals were concerned about “alarming” the general public and were divided on the need to specifically focus on the vaccine and antiviral issue**
- Many frontline professionals were unclear about the threat and potential consequences



Conclusions (3)

- The **general public information** needs are as follows:
 - outline what pandemic flu is and how it compares with ordinary flu
 - stress the monitoring and planning work underway by the government and WHO
 - highlight the difficulties with a vaccine - but emphasise “work” on the issue
 - emphasise hygiene measures and the importance of infection control



Conclusions (4)

- Health professionals concluded a **“drip feed” approach to communication** be adopted
- **HPA Comms Leads, CCDCs and Immunisation Co-ordinators** were most concerned about current level of contingency planning:
 - higher prioritisation across the country is needed
 - consistent/cohesive plans with DH very important
 - clear lines of communication throughout is crucial



Conclusions (5)

- Overall, it was felt that the communication strategy needs to provide both the public and health professionals with a **strong sense of leadership, reassurance, guidance, direction** and a **sense of purpose**:

“if we go down the doom laden route, what good will it do?”

