



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Office of the Secretary

Office of the Assistant Secretary for
Preparedness & Response

National Biodefense Science Board
Washington, D.C. 20201

AUG 11 2008

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

RADM William C. Vanderwagen, M.D.
Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt and Admiral Vanderwagen:

At the June 18, 2008, meeting of the National Biodefense Science Board, the Department presented information to the Board on considerations for home stockpiling of antibiotics for use following an anthrax attack. The discussion included both plans to develop and evaluate a standardized MedKit, and guidance documents for families that might wish to stockpile antibiotics through an ordinary prescription obtained from a physician. This was promoted as a way of encouraging individual responsibility and promoting community resilience, values we endorse.

As we communicated to you in a letter following the June Meeting, the Board expressed many concerns about personal stockpiling of antibiotics, particularly through ordinary prescriptions. We agree though that the issue of rapid distribution of countermeasures is urgent and we have established a Working Group to address personal stockpiling as well as other personal preparedness and rapid dispensing issues.

The scientific and practical benefits of individual stockpiling of ordinary antibiotic prescriptions remain to be demonstrated. Data must be developed that will estimate what if any impact this will have to improve preparedness. There are already substantial scientific data to demonstrate risk, including antibiotic misuse, inappropriate dosing, adverse events and selection of resistance through misuse before an event. Additional quantification of these risks is needed.

We are concerned that the Department is moving forward rapidly to implement individual stockpiling with the proposed posting and promotion of a question and answer document. We believe that this would be unwise before the science is adequately examined. Moreover, there is a high risk of providing a confusing message that does not have the endorsement of experts in public health, biodefense, and infectious disease, nor of the majority of medical practitioners.

Our concerns and recommendations, as well as those of other experts have not yet been adequately addressed. We urge you not to move precipitously to promote home stockpiling before the scientific questions can be answered and to address the concerns of clinicians and the public health community.

Sincerely,

/s/ Patricia Quinlisk, M.D.

Patricia Quinlisk, M.D., M.P.H., Chair
National Biodefense Science Board

cc: Julie Gerberding, M.D., M.P.H.
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