



**THE BRNO WORKSHOP  
LEADERSHIP IN THE FIRST PANDEMIC OF THE 21ST CENTURY**

Exploring Pandemic Preparedness Experiences in the State of Illinois and in the Czech Republic  
2009 – 2010

The Chief Public Health Officer and Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic Hosts  
Historic Transatlantic Workshop in Brno, Czech Republic

By

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On Monday, March 22, 2010 Dr. Michael Vit, Chief Public Health Officer and Vice-Minister of the Czech Ministry of Health, hosted public health leaders and legal scholars from the State of Illinois, U.S.A., for the purpose of sharing experiences in the public health response to swine flu, the first pandemic of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009. There was much to discuss.



National Centre of Nursing Brno, Czech Republic where the Workshop was held.

Dr. Michael Vit opened the Workshop by introducing his transatlantic public health colleagues from the State of Illinois, U.S.A., to the Workshop attendees.



Professor Michael Seng and Adjunct Professor Judith W. Munson greeted the public health leaders in attendance from the Czech operations on behalf of the John Marshall Law School in Chicago and introduced the public health practitioners and academicians from the Illinois operations who would present sessions at the Workshop.



The public health communities in Illinois and the Czech Republic have been collaborating on preparedness strategies since the International Collaborative for Public Health Emergency Preparedness

(ICPHEP) was established in 2006 <http://www.icpheap.org/>.<sup>1</sup> The ICPHEP has conducted workshops in Prague and facilitated faculty consultancies, student exchanges and practitioner meetings in both Illinois and the Czech Republic. It is now housed in the Czech/Slovak Legal Institute at the John Marshall Law School in Chicago, Illinois [http://www.jmls.edu/fairhousingcenter/czech/slovak\\_legal\\_institute/index.shtml](http://www.jmls.edu/fairhousingcenter/czech/slovak_legal_institute/index.shtml).

Workshop attendance was by special invitation only. Included were Regional Crisis Managers, Fire Brigade representatives, Crisis Center of Prague representatives, the First Public Health Officer of the Czech Army, and delegates from the faculty of the University of Defence and its hospital.

### THE MORNING PROGRAM



Professor Louis Rowitz, PhD, Director of the Leadership Institute<sup>2</sup> at the University of Illinois at Chicago, School of Public Health (UIC/SPH), presented sessions on the principles of public health leadership. He emphasized the distinction between leadership and management and how managers can move into the leadership mode by applying the principles. He also spoke about the concept of meta-leadership and its immediate importance in the international arena of public health emergency preparedness linkages. Dr. Damon Arnold, Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health, also spoke to the strengths of the meta-leadership concepts when responders have been trained using them in preparation for times of crisis.



<sup>1</sup> The ICPHEP is a cooperative endeavor of governmental public health agencies, academic institutions (public health, law and medicine), and not-for-profit entities here in Chicago, in Illinois, and in the Czech Republic. It synergizes their international interests, academic strengths, and transatlantic connections to create innovations in workforce training and development and to foster new partnerships. The locus of the ICPHEP in Chicago, Illinois is especially advantageous. A formidable array of expertise is available from the institutions located here. Our efforts have been enthusiastically embraced by professionals and their institutions in the Czech Republic. See [http://www.icpheap.org/who\\_we\\_are\\_what\\_we\\_do.html](http://www.icpheap.org/who_we_are_what_we_do.html). This public health leadership Workshop in Brno has the potential to showcase a new era of cooperation on the international platform between the two countries.

<sup>2</sup> Officially, the Mid-America Regional Public Health Leadership Institute (MARPHLI).

## THE AFTERNOON PROGRAM

The afternoon sessions consisted of exchanges specific to the experiences in the response to the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in each jurisdiction—the State of Illinois in the USA and the Czech Republic. The two geographical entities share peculiar commonalities: both are located in the heart of the larger geopolitical landscape: Illinois is in the center of the Midwest region of the United States; the Czech Republic is located in the heart of Europe. Illinois has twelve million inhabitants; the Czech Republic has more than ten million. At the time of the Workshop, there were 102 deaths from the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in the Czech Republic; in Illinois, there had been 100 deaths.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Michael Vit spoke first, describing the chain of events as the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 claimed its first victim in the Czech Republic on October 23, 2009, six months after it had broken out of Mexico. One of the major frustrations as they worked through the response plan of the Czech Republic<sup>4</sup> was the delay in receiving the vaccine.

Professor Roman Prymula, Director of the hospital at the University of Defence in Hradec Kralove, spoke to the topic of vaccine issues more specifically, touching upon the communication points—the World Health Organization, the European Centre for Disease Control, and the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic—which did not always convey consistent messages. The representative from the Fire Brigade of the Czech Republic, Plk.Ing. Chalupa, addressed the issue of determining the most important public entities for the functioning of the government during a pandemic.

Dr. Damon Arnold was last to take the microphone to share the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 experiences in Illinois. He stated that in Illinois, as in the Czech Republic, grave delays in the receipt of the vaccine necessitated a “change of message.” The similarities in the events in Illinois with what had occurred in the Czech Republic were striking.

It was significant for each participant and for each attendee to have a point where they could feel a collegial identity with the events which were being described, and for certain, each and everyone did. Ranging from the low-lethality of the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 to the delay in receiving the shipments of vaccine to mixed messages being relayed by the media (including the role of bloggers and other non-traditional media outlets), all of these issues and more, were discussed by the attendees in open Q & A sessions with the speakers.



<sup>3</sup> At the time of the Brno Workshop, WHO was reporting that 213 countries and overseas territories have reported laboratory confirmed cases of pandemic influenza H1N1 2009, including at least 16,813 deaths. [http://www.who.int/csr/don/2010\\_03\\_19/en/print.html](http://www.who.int/csr/don/2010_03_19/en/print.html).

<sup>4</sup> Pandemic Plan of the CR, Plan of measures for the case of an influenza pandemic caused by a new strain of the influenza virus, October 2006.

Below: Intent listeners: Prof. Seng, Dr. Arnold & Dr. Vit



Below: Dr. Michael Vit



### Concluding Remarks

Judith Munson concluded the long and productive extended-day program by highlighting a paragraph from the recently-released U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Interim Implementation Guide of the National Health Security Strategy<sup>5</sup> document. It underscores the importance of what happened in Brno on March 22, 2010:

***International community.** Increasingly, health security also requires collaboration among international organizations and governments, as many risks and threats do not respect borders and are heightened due to globalization and technology; moreover, experience outside the United States offers a fertile and heretofore largely untapped avenue to help inform national health security policy and practices.*

Everyone who attended the Workshop or who participated in it in any degree, went away armed with new information and insights. All had observed—close up—that the sharing of lessons learned and challenges overcome (or not) could enrich the professionalism of public health practitioners and enhance their leadership skills beyond measure by reason of this transatlantic collaboration. Future challenges—sure to come—are lightened because of the enlarged knowledge base that comes from others charged with the awesome responsibility of being prepared to respond to unknown and unnamed threats to the public's health.

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<sup>5</sup> Page 20 of the Interim Implementation Guide of the National Health Security Strategy of the United States of America, USDHHS, December 2009. [http://www.hhs.gov/aspr/ops/nhss/nhss\\_iig0912.pdf](http://www.hhs.gov/aspr/ops/nhss/nhss_iig0912.pdf) . Although dated December 2009, the document was released in February, 2010.



**Speakers at the Brno Workshop March 22, 2010**

Convened by the Dr. Michael Vit, the Chief Public Health Officer of the Czech Republic Ministry of Health  
(From left to right: Dr. Roman Prymula, Judith W. Munson, Prof. Michael Seng, Prof. Louis Rowitz, Dr. Damon Arnold, Dr. Karla Rihova, Dr. Michael Vit, Dr. Jitka Chmelikova, Dr. Otakar Vychodil, Dr. Lubos Navratil, Jiri Chalupa, Dr. Frantisek Bilek)



**The Culprit**