

**Acknowledgements**

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**Public health surveillance in France**

**T**HE introduction of the Minitel communication system in France opened the door to a number of initiatives in medical communication. In particular a French communicable disease network was established. General practitioners belonging to the network report new cases of a variety of illnesses on a regular basis. Chauvin and Valleron sought the opinion of 280 contributing general practitioners and of 280 general practitioners who had made some contact with the network but did not actually belong to it. Using a self-administered questionnaire and a visual analogue scale across the range from very interesting to not at all interesting, they were asked about their attitude to the surveillance of 17 communicable diseases.

All the 280 contributing general practitioners and 256 (91%) of the contact group returned questionnaires — a remarkable response rate. Some small differences were evident in the answers given by the two groups, from different age groups and from doctors in urban and rural locations but none was large enough to be considered important. The four conditions considered to be most important were viral hepatitis, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) serology, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted diseases; the four least important were diphtheria, chickenpox, whooping cough and scarlet fever. The results cannot be considered in isolation from an understanding of the other sources of information available in France about these conditions, but the emphasis on diseases with a high social interest is particularly noticeable.

A motivation question (single choice of five alternatives) disclosed that 40% of 536 general practitioners wished to contribute to public health work and that 25% had an interest in epidemiology. While I have reservations about the validity of general practitioner opinion surveys, the results left me wondering what our own sentinel practices in this country think about public health surveillance and epidemiology.

D M FLEMING

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Source: Chauvin P, Valleron AJ. Attitude of French general practitioners to the public health surveillance of communicable diseases. *Int J Epidemiol* 1995; 24: 435-440.

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