

Rob Strong



FIGHTING THE VIRUSES OF THE FUTURE

DANIEL LUCEY D '77, MED '81 GRADUATED DARTMOUTH MEDICAL SCHOOL (now Geisel School of Medicine) thinking he was going to be a neurologist. But as a resident in San Francisco in the early 1980s, Lucey found himself on the front lines of the burgeoning AIDS epidemic.

“Within three months of arriving in San Francisco, I decided to go into infectious diseases,” Lucey says.

Today, Lucey, who also has a Master of Public Health degree from Harvard, is an adjunct professor of infectious diseases at Georgetown University. He has traveled to the sites of almost every major disease outbreak since the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic of 2003. And he’s motivated to share what he’s learned from past outbreaks to help the world prepare for those of the future.

“After providing hands-on care to over 200 patients with Ebola in 2014, I’d wake up every day thinking, ‘What’s the next epidemic and what can I do to contribute toward slowing it down or preventing it?’” Lucey says.

In 2014, he pitched the idea of an exhibit about epidemics to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and almost four years later, in May 2018, “Outbreak: Epidemics in a Connected World” opened at the Museum of Natural History.

The exhibition focuses on zoonoses—diseases caused by pathogens that are transmitted to humans by domestic animals and wildlife—and emphasizes the connections between people, animals, and the environment. Geared toward a lay audience, the exhibit invites visitors to join epidemiologists, veterinarians, public health workers, and citizens as they rush to identify and respond to infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola virus, influenza, Zika virus, and

others. Highlights include an interactive simulation, multiplayer game, and personal narratives from people who’ve been on the ground during harrowing outbreaks.

Open until 2021, “Outbreak” has already drawn close to 1.5 million visitors. But for people who can’t make it to the Smithsonian, a traveling do-it-yourself exhibition is available for communities and institutions to print on demand.

In helping design the exhibition, Lucey worked with a multidisciplinary team of collaborators who shared his wish to educate, offer hope, and transform fear.

“While the actual Ebola epidemic occurred in Africa, an epidemic of fear took off here in America,” Lucey says. But he knows firsthand that a fear confronted plants a seed of courage.

“Everybody at an outbreak site is afraid, and they should be afraid. But fear can be a good thing. You transform it into energy, vigilance, and extra care for your patients,” Lucey says.

“First you’re most worried about getting Ebola . . . then you’re most worried about having to leave while there are still patients and other caregivers who could use your help.”

Lucey’s dedication to treating some of the sickest patients, often in the poorest parts of the world, stems from his days at Dartmouth. As a first-year medical student, Lucey was eager to start working with patients. Classmate John Lawrence MED ’80 encouraged him to go to Soweto, South Africa, for hands-on

experience, and he loved the work so much he returned there during his fourth year.

A staunch supporter of patient-centered care, global health, and other pillars of today’s Geisel curriculum, Lucey returns to the Dartmouth campus frequently, most recently to speak at the 2019 Physicians for Human Rights Regional Student Conference in January. He also serves on the Board of Advisors of the Center for Health Equity at Geisel. Activities like these are among the many steps Lucey is taking to ensure the lessons of his career are applied to outbreaks of the future.

LAUREN SEIDMAN

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