



Microbiologist J. Anthony Morris (r), a longtime critic of flu vaccines, was fired from the Food and Drug Administration for publicly opposing the swine flu program. Lawyer James Turner is helping Morris in his battle for redress.

WASHINGTON Post 12/28/77

# Scientist J. Anthony Morris— He Fought the Flu Shots And the U. S. Fired Him

by Alexander Cockburn & James Ridgeway

WASHINGTON, D.C.

**B**ehind the recent turmoil over the government's swine flu vaccine program lies a heated controversy that has been raging in medical circles since World War II. Top government scientists have argued that mass vaccination against influenza, which kills thousands of Americans during epidemics, is essential if the nation is ever to defeat diseases of the respiratory system, including the common cold. These scientists saw the swine flu vaccine program as a giant leap forward in preventive medicine involving over 200 million people.

But within the federal health agencies isolated voices have long warned against excessive enthusiasm for flu vaccines. Until the apparent fiasco of the

swine flu program these critics went unheeded. Now, in the Congress and in the highest reaches of the federal health establishment, there is deep concern over the conduct of the war against flu.

Politicians such as Sen. Edward Kennedy (D., Mass.) and Rep. Paul Rogers (D., Fla.), the chief health watchdogs in Congress, and Dr. Albert Sabin, who developed the "live" polio vaccine, have all expressed their disquiet. The government's Center for Disease Control in Atlanta has been reexamining the swine flu campaign it so enthusiastically advocated last year.

On Feb. 9, Joseph A. Califano Jr., Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, lifted part of a ban on flu vaccinations, in effect since Dec. 16. Bivalent vaccine against swine flu and the

A-Victoria strain was recommended for high-risk persons. But monovalent vaccine against swine flu remained banned.

The major impetus behind criticism of flu vaccines can be traced back to the work of J. Anthony Morris.

A microbiologist, now 59, Morris has worked on viral diseases since World War II, when he began his studies at the Army's Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. His medical detective work into the origins of disease took him to Japan, Korea and Micronesia.

In the mid-1950's, after an outbreak of polio, Morris was recalled from Asia to take a major job, in a reorganized laboratory within the National Institutes of Health (NIH). His task was to investigate vaccines and assess the risk factors involved in their use.

## 'Didn't work'

Morris began to concentrate on flu vaccines and became alarmed at what he found. He discovered, for example, that there was no way to measure the potency of vaccines. No matter what the labels on a batch said, the actual strength of the dose might vary. But far more serious, Morris says, as a result of his experiments, he "was convinced we had scientific evidence that flu vaccines didn't work."

By the mid-1960's Morris was deeply involved in experiments on the long-term effects of flu vaccine and his research was indicating that, far from stopping flu, vaccination might well increase an individual's susceptibility. He studied side effects, including neurological reactions. And it was not until last year that deaths from a form of paralysis called Guillain-Barré syndrome spelled out what these neurological reactions might involve.

## Fiercely opposed

The scientist's criticism of flu vaccines ran directly counter to national medical strategy, and he began to run into fierce opposition from his superiors at NIH. "I don't know for certain why," Morris says, "but there is a close tie between government scientists and manufacturing scientists. And I was hurting the market for flu vaccine."

When Morris told NIH in a memorandum that he believed flu vaccines to be of minimum benefit, he was relieved of his formal duties as influenza control officer. Gradually his laboratory staff was whittled down. Publication of his scientific articles was blocked by superiors. Thousands of experimental animals, crucial to his work, were ordered destroyed. Finally he was forced from his laboratory and given a small room with no telephone. His research materials were grated and taken away.

It was at this point that Morris, in desperation, went to the law offices of Edward Bennett Williams to seek help. They said it looked like another Ernie Fitzgerald case and turned him away.

continued

Fitzgerald is a civil servant in the Pentagon who was victimized for exposing cost overruns in the Defense Department.

Morris kept fighting. "At no time," he recalls, "did I believe that we would lose this battle. The people we were opposing were so obviously wrong."

Morris' fortunes began to improve when in 1970 John Gardner—the former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare who then headed the public interest organization Common Cause — telephoned Ralph Nader's office and was put on to James Turner, one of "Nader's Raiders." Health was an area of Turner's concern. He got in touch with Morris, checked out his scientific credentials, and spent six months poring over Morris' work. "I was very impressed," Turner says, "and I thought we had a chance to win."

**NIH accused**

Together they drew up a detailed memorandum charging irregularities in the NIH's handling of flu vaccines and alleging that the government had long been certifying for public consumption watered-down vaccines. This report became the basis for a grievance proceeding on behalf of Morris within the government, and it sparked an investigation by Sen. Abraham Ribicoff (D., Conn.). Soon the General Accounting Office was called in to investigate.

In the face of the Turner attack, NIH officials could only retort that Morris "was extremely difficult to deal with." Ribicoff's Senate hearings prompted then-Secretary of HEW Elliot Richardson to transfer Morris' laboratory to the Food and Drug Administration, where he resumed his work. Morris had been vindicated, but his lonely watchdog role was by no means over. The government continued its flu vaccination program as if nothing had happened.

Morris then began to investigate the new "live" flu vaccines that the government hoped would be the eventual conqueror of the flu. The vaccine administered to the public has been composed of "dead" viral material. A live vaccine, which can be inhaled or taken in the form of nose drops, contains living virus modified in such a way that

it produces a mild case of the disease. It is thought to produce the right kind of antibodies to protect against the disease. This live vaccine was given to humans, including small children, in the early 1970's in a test program. Morris began to test the live vaccine in mice—a precaution which had not been taken. He found that the live vaccine

accelerated the growth of tumors in the test animals.

The alarming finding that live flu vaccine might be carcinogenic was acutely embarrassing to federal health experts, since the vaccine already had been tested on people, had won special Congressional support as a potential cure-all for flu and was indeed earmarked for

eventual public use. Morris' unpopularity among the health bureaucrats increased markedly.

Then came the final straw: Last year he became a prominent public critic of the swine flu program. A mass swine flu inoculation program was dangerous, he argued, since it was impossible to accurately measure vaccine potency. In-

oculation might thus result in hypersensitivity and trigger neurologic illnesses ranging from persistent headaches to encephalitis to paralysis to Guillain-Barré and to death. And, he insisted, the swine flu vaccine produces a kind of antibody that doesn't protect. In other words, it doesn't work. This was just too much for the FDA, and

Commissioner Alexander Schmidt fired Morris for "insubordination."

Morris, working out of Turner's small law firm in downtown Washington or from his suburban Washington home, went on with his campaign. He carried his arguments to the press, ran down case histories of side effects occurring during the mass vaccination program



Morris insists on the public's right to know. "Given full information," he maintains, "they won't take the vaccine."

and continued to appear at NIH flu meetings to argue his case.

Morris seems once again to have been vindicated. He has always warned against crash vaccination programs before adequate research had been carried out. The fate of the government's war on swine flu appears to have confirmed his misgivings. He has become the central spokesman against flu vaccines.

But his fight remains a lonely one. Once again he is unemployed, seeking redress through endless Civil Service Commission procedures. Turner wages the legal battle gratis. "Without Jim," Morris says, "they would have wiped me out." Morris, who takes no unemployment insurance, lives off his dwindling savings, refusing to accept lecture fees on the grounds they might be compromising.

After nearly 20 years of struggle within the federal government, Morris fights on. "It's a medical rip-off," he says of the flu vaccine program. "We should recognize that we don't know enough about the dangers associated with flu vaccine. I believe the public should have truthful information on the basis of which they can determine whether or not to take the vaccine." And he adds, "I believe that, given full information, they won't take the vaccine."