

Media Releases

Global Communications Technology Praised for Role in Slowing the Early Spread of the SARS Epidemic

Singapore, May 6, 2003

The APEC Emerging Infections Network (EINet) has cited the value of e-mail and other global information technologies for providing early warning on the dangers of the SARS epidemic.

The use of global communications technology has enabled health professionals to communicate and compare first-hand experience of the evolving SARS virus at a very early stage.

It is hoped this early information sharing, that was enabled by the APEC Emerging Infections Network, slowed the early spread of the SARS virus and consequently saved lives.

This observation was made in a report prepared by the EINet, which is based at the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of Washington in Seattle, for distribution in APEC member economies and APEC forums.

EINet Director, Dr. Ann Marie Kimball, said in the report that the sharing of early information through informal channels provided benefits that were not possible before the wide-spread use of modern technologies.

"It is hoped that the use of e-mail, online information services, and other informal communication between health workers in the region saved lives by alerting health practitioners to the developing dangers of the virus," Dr. Kimball noted in the report.

"This is a form of early warning and communication that would not have been possible if the SARS Virus had appeared ten years ago."

The report entitled 'Lessons of SARS: The APEC/EINet Experience,' offers three lessons that have become apparent since the emergence of SARS.

The report notes that modern technologies have the potential to save lives by removing time and space as a barrier to the communication of crucial medical information. Secondly that health care professionals in the field utilize and appreciate the value of online resources such as EINet to share information about serious emerging medical issues. Finally the report notes that the use of informal networks of communication between health-care and policy-making interest groups lead to better decisions made in the field.

APEC is most proud of the work and efforts of the EINet in protecting the prosperity of the region. APEC EINet was launched in 1996 by APEC as a response mechanism to the threat that infections such as SARS pose to the economic and social health of the region.

The full report is available at the EINet website:
www.APEC.org/infectious (<http://www.apec.org/infectious>)

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