

## Swines, students and a village called Ohrid

**Ragna Boerma**

In English it is called swine flu, in Dutch it is called Mexican flu and in Spain it is simply referred to as A flu. The names are as confusing as the disease itself. Swine flu suggests it can only be transmitted by touching sweet little piggies and Mexican flu might offend the almost 106 million Mexicans who are just as healthy as the rest of the world. So maybe the Spaniards chose the safest option by giving it the somewhat mysterious name gripe A. But to avoid any more confusion, let's stick to the most objective name. We are talking about H1N1, the new pandemic flu that is starting to paralyze

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this world.

Safety instructions on how to avoid the transmission of the H1N1 virus appear everywhere with incredible speed: from the disinfecting hand gel being sold in every supermarket, to the signs on the Macedonian airports warning us of influenzka. Wash your hands, avoid close contact with sneezing people, disinfect everything you touch, live and eat as healthily as possible... We probably all know these rules and really try our best to live up to this advice as best as we can.

So was I out of my mind when I decided to join the huge gathering of about 700 young people from all over the world in a small Macedonian village named Ohrid last summer? You can't think of any circumstances more perfect to get infected with H1N1 than the IFMSA General Assembly, that was held in Macedonia this August.

At this meeting, medical students from all possible countries come together

and live in a small, closed society for some ten days. Mexican, Brazilian, Japanese and Sudanese students, we all travelled to Macedonia, possibly taking the famous virus from the hospital we have been working at with us in our suitcases. Having arrived safely after a long trip, our H1N1 could start doing its job and spread under the 700 students present. We are all young people, aged from approximately eighteen to thirty years old, and isn't this just the target group of the swine flu?

Add to these worrying facts the circumstances of an average students' meeting: unhealthy food, lack of sleep, an excess of alcohol, and close, sometimes very close contact with fellow students... It almost seems as if this meeting was designed to spread H1N1 through out the world's continents, except for the lucky bastards in Antarctica who don't have a medical school.

By now, three months later, the chance I got infected with H1N1 in Macedonia is probably zero. Still, somehow I keep expecting an alarming email in my mailbox saying that one of the 700 GA attendees has been found to have H1N1 and telling us that we should all be quarantined for an indefinite period of time. What a wonderful idea, I know a hotel in a cute little village called Ohrid where we could perfectly spend some more weeks together...

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