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News Release

USU Researchers Find Validity in 1918 Treatment for Avian Influenza

BETHESDA, Md. – USU faculty have discovered that a treatment for Spanish Influenza pandemic may also be effective for current Avian Influenza patients. Navy Capt. Edward Kilbane, Army Col. Jeffrey Jackson and Navy Lt. Cmdr. Thomas Luke, are all alumni and faculty of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. They, along with retired Navy physician Capt. Stephen Hoffman, published their research Tuesday, Aug. 29 in the online edition of the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

The four researchers analyzed medical literature reported during the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 to 1920. They found that transfusions with blood products from Spanish Flu survivors may have reduced the risk of death in seriously ill Spanish Flu patients.

The meta analysis of these data show that treatment of patients in 1918 with convalescent whole blood, plasma or serum obtained from humans who had recovered from Spanish Influenza resulted in a reduced mortality of seriously ill patients by 50 percent.

The next steps would be a study of whether using anti-bodies recovered from patients who have survived AV containing anti-H5N1 could lead to similar results for patients with Avian Influenza.

“Plasma is produced in local hospitals worldwide and transfusions might be useful in treating bird flu patients during outbreaks and pandemics, especially in light of the limitations of existing treatment options,” Commander Luke said. “A single recovered bird-flu patient could donate a weekly volume of plasma sufficient to treat many patients with H5N1 influenza.”

An article titled, “Convalescent Blood Products for Spanish Influenza Pneumonia: A Future H5N1 Treatment?” will be published in the Oct. 17 print edition of *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

Established by the U.S. Congress in 1972, the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (www.usuhs.mil) is located on the campus of the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and is the nation’s only federal school of medicine and graduate school of nursing.

For more information, contact the Office of External Affairs at (301) 295-9475.

(Information obtained from a Bureau of Medicine and Surgery release)