Introduction

The First International Conference on Tularemia:
Umeå, Sweden, 23–25 August 1995

Gunnar Sandström, Anders Sjöstedt, Arne Tärnvik

Francisella tularensis has been recognized as a human pathogen since the beginning of this century. It occurs endemically over the northern hemisphere and active research has been undertaken primarily in Russia, USA, Japan, and Scandinavia. The languages and vast distances that separate the tularemia researchers have hampered scientific exchange and collaboration in the field. These factors are particularly relevant to those carrying out research in Russia: a major part of their work has been published in Russian journals and is therefore relatively inaccessible to other tularemia researchers. To this end, we believed that arranging an International Conference on Tularemia would serve several valuable purposes, e.g. initiation of international collaboration, exchange of scientific material and results, and informal personal meetings.

Tularemia research during recent decades has focused on the following areas: human immune responses to F. tularensis, the establishment of an experimental murine model of the disease and elucidation of host-parasite interactions in this model, the development of methods and identification of relevant antigens for the serological diagnosis of tularemia, phylogenetic analysis, and elucidation of the epidemiology. With this background, the following sessions were included in the meeting: (i) epidemiology and laboratory diagnosis of tularemia; (ii) experimental animal models of tularemia; (iii) virulence of Francisella tularensis; and (iv) tularemia vaccines. There was also a poster section with 45 entries.

Although the meeting only lasted two days, the participants were intensely active and many discussions were stimulated by the oral presentations. Moreover, between the sessions many informal discussions took place. Hopefully the meeting therefore functioned as a catalyst for some of the aims, such as initiating collaboration and enabling the exchange of materials and results. The discussions also highlighted several important questions that need to be addressed by future Francisella research. For example, what kind of tularemia vaccines are needed in the future? Is the experimental murine model of tularemia a valid model for elucidation of the host-parasite interaction in human tularemia? What kind of genetic systems are required before the host-parasite interaction of tularemia can be elucidated at a molecular level? What is the natural reservoir of F. tularensis and what is the basis for the zoonotic transmission during tularemia epidemics?

These and other relevant questions will hopefully be the focus of future tularemia research and form a basis for a tentative Second International Conference on Tularemia.