

ODU AWARDED GRANT TO PARTICIPATE IN BIOSURVEILLANCE PROJECT

Suppose the avian flu or a bioterrorist attack occurs in a large metropolitan area. Would health-care providers be prepared to respond?

Researchers at Old Dominion University want to make sure the answer is yes.

With a \$70,000, two-year grant from the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ODU is working on a biosurveillance project to develop an automated decision-support method so that health-care providers can react swiftly and effectively in the case of bioterrorist attacks and emerging infections.

The study, done in collaboration with the Mayo Clinic and Vanderbilt University, will search for patterns in patient symptoms that emerge during the early stages of the outbreak.

“Through biosurveillance, we are attempting to recognize suspicious concurrences of early symptoms for better response,” said Andrew Balas, dean of Old Dominion’s College of Health Sciences.

The study will apply SNOMED Clinical Terms (SNOMED CT), a coding language that makes health-care terms consistent and universal, to current patient records. The coded records can then provide shared data across specialties and health-care sites.

SNOMED CT offers a common language for electronic medical records, ICU monitoring, clinical-decision support, medical research studies, clinical trials, computerized physician-order entry, disease surveillance, image indexing and consumer health information services.

“We hope to see a more advanced, unified and computerized patient record – no matter what doctor, specialist or hospital a patient visits,” Balas said.

The technology can significantly reduce response time, he noted. For example, clinicians must often wait on lab tests for a full diagnosis. If they were made aware earlier that an outbreak of a certain disease had occurred, they could spring into action much more quickly.

“These typical sets of symptoms overall create a picture of a disease,” said Balas, who expects the project to develop profiles to recognize cases of anthrax, radiation injury, avian flu, and other illnesses.

“It is important to use all available data effectively to improve the chances of early prevention and better treatment,” he added.

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