

12 December 2019

On this eve of the 2019 summer holiday season in South Africa, I have compiled this newsletter with perspectives and information on just some highlights of the year, besides the training and other consulting that is normally conducted. I end the newsletter with my perspective on the sporadic listeriosis cases published by the NICD in September 2019.

NEW LOGO AND WEBSITE

We decided earlier this year to develop a new logo (see above) and with that a “new-look” website, which can accommodate so much more information. The website address has not changed – it remains www.anelichconsulting.co.za. What with the load-shedding seeming to be with us for some time yet, see [here](#) for guidance on keeping your food safe during load shedding. Feel free to share it with your friends and family.

ISOPOL CONFERENCE – SEPTEMBER IN TORONTO

I was honoured with an invitation to give the keynote presentation at the ISOPOL Conference, which was held this time in Toronto, Canada. The title of my presentation was “The Listeriosis Outbreak in South Africa: Lessons Learned” in which I included a number of updates, not yet shown/shared in South Africa. As has been the case with similar presentations I have given in other countries, it elicited huge reaction. This conference is rather unique in that it focusses **only** on *Listeria* and the illness listeriosis – three full days of nothing but *Listeria*, hence the name “International Symposium on Problems of *Listeria* and Listeriosis (ISOPOL). The conference only occurs every three years and each time in a different country. High-class research was presented by excellent speakers from both the food and medical fraternities across the world; this brought home to me once again, the incredible characteristics of this debilitating pathogen, which makes it so unique. At the risk of using a much-used cliché, the high level of research conducted was simply, amazing. [Read more](#) on the conference.

ICMSF (International Commission on the Microbiological Specifications for Foods) MEETING

The annual meeting of this extremely influential group in food microbiology and food safety circles internationally, of which I am extremely proud to be a member, met from 01-11 October 2019 in Sydney, Australia this time. We held two days of high level workshops, with one focusing on Water Security and the other on various topics such as Whole Genome Sequencing, Big Data and Food Safety Challenges, Biosecurity Risk Management, Digital Solutions for Supply Chain Integrity and the like.

One of the key objectives of the workshops was to provide thought leadership to policy makers and other stakeholders into the development of appropriate risk-based microbiological criteria and other risk management options.

During the rest of our time together, we tackled our new book, Book 9 which takes quite a different view from

the norm; in this book we are focusing on food safety and risk management in an era of many pressures on the “food system” including, disruptive technologies, climate change, increasing global population, mega-cities, the impact of social media on how consumers perceive food safety and the consequent impact on the food industry, water scarcity and the re-use of water and much, much more. It is a very ambitious project, but oh so exhilarating! We simultaneously worked on two position papers, which we plan to publish soon and I shall keep you informed.

The ICMSF has observer status at the Codex Alimentarius Commission. In this regard, an Electronic Working Group (EWG) was established by the Codex Committee for Food Hygiene (CCFH) to revise the General Principles of Food Hygiene with a specific focus on the HACCP portion. Three of us, of which I am one, are on that EWG for the ICMSF. This means that we have regularly been making extensive comments to Codex Alimentarius on this revision and will continue to do so until the revision is completed.

CCAFRICA decided at its most recent meeting held in September in Nairobi, Kenya to establish an EWG to develop a Regional Work Plan for 2020-2021 to support implementation of the Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025. On behalf of the ICMSF, I am participating in this EWG as well and the first round of comments has been submitted.

APPOINTMENT AS ADJUNCT PROFESSOR AT CUT

I am truly humbled by my appointment as Adjunct Professor at the Central University of Technology (CUT). This occurred a few months back and already there are some exciting projects in the pipeline that I am working on together with Prof Ryk Lues and his excellent team. These include international colleagues from other universities and span quite a variety of topics, taking a holistic approach, which is one of the strengths of the CUT team.

YET ANOTHER NEW BOOK!

This time, I am not doing the writing, but the editing, which to be frank is much harder work! The International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) in the USA has been publishing “Present Knowledge in Nutrition” (PKN) for a number of years, which has become a stalwart of the nutrition community. Last year, ILSI decided to tackle a new publication in a similar vein i.e. Present Knowledge in Food Safety (PKFS), which includes chemical and microbiological food safety. We are 4 co-editors (in alphabetical order): Dr Lucia Anelich (SA), Dr Alan Boobis (UK) Dr Michael Knowles (UK-Greece) and Dr Bert Pöpping (Germany). We have teamed up with Elsevier as our preferred publisher and are still in the phase of procuring authors. I am including a number of South African authors for “my” chapters, as it is my firm opinion that too many SA scientists do not get the exposure they deserve.

PERSPECTIVE ON LISTERIOSIS CASES IN SA DESIGNATED AS “SPORADIC”

The National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) conducts surveillance activities on listeriosis cases occurring in South Africa. This is because the illness became notifiable on 15 December 2017 after the 2017/2018 listeriosis outbreak in SA.

Results published by the NICD for the period 3 September 2018 to 18 September 2019 showed the following:

- 87 laboratory cases were confirmed;
- Outcome data was available for 67 out of 87 cases i.e.77%;
- Of the 67 cases, 21 have died (31%);

Fourteen different sequence types (ST) had been identified, four of which were ST6. Three of the ST6 strains were not related to the 2017/2018 outbreak strain, whilst one did belong to the same outbreak cluster.

What is the significance of surveillance?

Surveillance objectives usually comprise the following:

- Promptly investigating all cases
- Detecting clusters and outbreaks of disease, so as to enable prompt public health responses
- Identifying and controlling common sources of infection
- Understanding the local epidemiology of the disease to better inform prevention strategies

Surveillance therefore plays an important role in determining whether illnesses are due to an outbreak or not.

When are cases designated an outbreak?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the USA defines a foodborne disease outbreak as follows:

“An incident in which two or more persons experience a similar illness after ingestion of a common food, and epidemiologic analysis implicates the food as the source of the illness”.

The NICD definition is:

“Any foodborne disease/food poisoning incident affecting two or more people that are epidemiologically linked by a common food or beverage source”.

Therefore unless such links are made, the cases are viewed as sporadic rather than as an outbreak. For countries that keep statistics, reported rates are typically in the range 0.25 to 0.50 cases per 100 000 people. The USA is now at the lower end of that range (0.25) and France more towards the higher end. In fact, for a population of approximately 59 million people in SA, our rate of sporadic cases (based on the above data from NICD) is **lower** than other countries – around 0.15 per 100 000 people. This is obviously based on **current data available** – it may be that listeriosis is under-reported in SA and that the rate may actually be higher. Such rates also depend heavily on the diets of people in a country. For example, Japan maintains that they have a very low incidence of listeriosis at present, because their diet doesn't (yet) have those kinds of foods that are more prone to contamination with and/or support the growth of *Listeria monocytogenes*.

We should, however, not make the mistake of thinking that sporadic cases are only related to listeriosis. This is not the case. Salmonellosis is also under surveillance by many countries and sporadic cases are often reported for this illness as well.

FINALLY.....

I hope you have enjoyed this read! More of these are planned for 2020 – let me know if you do not wish to continue receiving such notifications. I invite you to book for courses as soon as possible as January and most of February 2020 is already full – see [here](#) for more information. Please note that I also develop custom-made courses for companies that may wish to have some specific aspects covered that are not normally included.

Anelich Consulting will shut down on 20 December 2019 and re-open on 15 January 2020. I am always available for urgent matters, though. Just give me a call on 082 9083166.

*My sincerest gratitude to
all my clients and colleagues who
supported me during yet another
busy and successful 2019.*

Happy Holidays and Safe Travels!

*Best wishes
Lucia Anelich*