The Arizona Medical Association (ArMA) was pleased to partner with the University of Arizona (UA) Valley Fever Center for Excellence (VFCE) in holding a stakeholder meeting on November 17 as part of the Valley Fever Awareness Week proceedings.

The stakeholder meeting offered an opportunity for members of the clinician community to gather, learn and collaborate. An ArMA House of Delegates resolution passed this year established ArMA’s position of supporting Valley Fever awareness, education, and funding, and called for ArMA to convene a statement of support with other clinician representative and health community organizations.

The meeting was well-attended by representatives from six Congressional offices, members of the community and our health partners at organizations including the Arizona Hospital and Health Care Association (AzHHA), Arizona Osteopathic Medical Association (AOMA), Arizona Academy of Family Physicians (AzAFP), and Arizona Chapter, American College of Physicians (AzACP).

The agenda began with an introductory overview of the current Valley Fever data in Arizona by Ken Komatsu, MPH, State Epidemiologist, Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS).

Mr. Daniel Leis provided an unfortunately not-atypical story of patient experience and perspective. He described how his stepson, who lives in Poland, came and worked in Arizona construction for three months and then struggled through a series of misdiagnoses and improper treatment before finally accessing the right resources to pursue a Valley Fever diagnosis and treatment. This patient experience is mirrored in many places across the country.

Dr. Tom Chiller, Deputy Chief, Mycotic Diseases Branch at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) presented a concise and dynamic national perspective on the State of Valley Fever. He noted that the formation and work of the Congressional Task Force on Valley Fever has provided impetus for the CDC to take an interest in the disease. Occurrences of the disease and the presence of the fungus in soil have emerged as far away as eastern Washington state.

Presentations from industry representatives working on diagnostics and treatment aspects of Valley Fever provided an exclusive view of some exciting developments. In the words of Tom Carpenter, DVM, PhD, President and CEO of Nielsen Biosciences, “While Valley Fever is nationally considered an orphan
disease in this region it is prevalent, and small business has an important role in tackling aspects of the disease related to diagnosis and treatment.” Nielsen has a skin test that will be complementary to blood diagnostics and treatment.

Todd Snowden, Director of Business Development at DxNA, described a genetic Valley Fever test to detect the fungus in respiratory specimens which is currently in clinical trials with clearance for market entry expected in April 2016.

Kathryn Sykes, PhD, VP of Research for HealthTell, reviewed the biotech company’s work in developing a snapshot of an individual’s Valley Fever immune status using a single drop of blood.

Sean Bauman, PhD, of IMMY, described Valley Fever screening as the “Wild Wild West” as there is no consensus. IMMY has a Later Flow Assay test currently in clinical trials with 2016 market entry expected.

David Larwood, MS, JD, MBA, of Valley Fever Solutions presented his company’s progress and future plans to make nikkomycin Z, a potential cure for Valley Fever, clinically available.

The companies present described the National Institutes of Health (NIH) as generally interested in developments related to Valley Fever, including grant support.

The community action discussion reviewed the pyramid of Valley Fever developments [see Figure 1]; while the top tier envisions a valley fever vaccination, the bottom tier urges us to do better now—educate and create complete awareness among all Arizona physicians and clinicians. As described by Dr. Kerilyn Bollmann, “You wake up, brush your teeth, and think about TB and cocci.”

The first step is available to all clinicians for free right now. Learn about Valley Fever and take advantage of the FREE Valley Fever online CME offered by the VFCE at www.vfce.arizona.edu/clinicians/FreeOnlineCME.aspx.

ArMA thanks our meeting organizers, John Galgiani, MD, Director, University of Arizona Valley Fever Center for Excellence, and Peter Kelly, MD, epidemiologist, ADHS, for their invaluable leadership and coordination in bringing together the individuals who contributed to the agenda. We thank Michael Grossman, MD, Special Assistant to the Dean, UA College of Medicine – Phoenix, for hosting the meeting and moderating the discussion. Dr. Grossman served as Chair of the ArMA Committee on Public Health for many years.

The meeting was generously supported by The University of Arizona College of Medicine – Phoenix, who hosted the meeting on their campus, and industry sponsors DxNA, HealthTell, IMMY, and Nielsen Biosciences.

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