Outbreak exhibit spotlights Tulane research against epidemics

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kbrannon@tulane.edu
504-862-8789
Outbreak: Epidemics in a Connected World is a free public exhibit in the Diboll Gallery in the Tidewater Building, 1440 Canal St. The exhibit opened May 1 and runs through July 31.

Tulane University researchers across disciplines have played an important role in fighting infectious disease epidemics around the globe. That storied history is brought to life in *OutBreak: Epidemics in a Connected World*, a new exhibit downtown co-sponsored by The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.

The exhibit covers a wide breadth of interdisciplinary research from the university's founding in 1834 to stop yellow fever to modern advances against other mosquito-borne viruses, HIV, Ebola and whooping cough.

"From its inception, Tulane has been a leader in the fight against infectious diseases," said Dr. Laura Levy, vice president of research. "This is an opportunity to share that story with those who may not be familiar with some of the groundbreaking advances that have happened right here in New Orleans at Tulane."

Some of these early achievements include developing the first binocular microscope that allowed viewing through a single lens. This was used in the first known study of cholera. The exhibit covers New Orleans' yellow fever epidemic and how Tulane doctors led research efforts to discover what caused the disease — and how to stop it from spreading.

The free exhibit runs through July 31 in the Diboll Gallery of the Tidewater Building, 1440 Canal St.

It includes some milestones the public may not know about. For example, Dr. William J. Mogabgab, chief of infectious diseases at Tulane's medical school in the 1950s, was the first researcher to isolate the common cold virus.

Tulane researchers have been instrumental in the fight against Ebola and Lassa Fever. They were some of the first responders against the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone and helped develop a rapid test to diagnose both diseases in the field.

MD/PhD graduate student Sally Baker spearheaded research for the project as a young ambassador for the American Society of Microbiology. She worked with Tulane's Office of Communications and Marketing to design the exhibit.

"Today, we continue to struggle with epidemics, such as the current measles outbreak. I thought it was important to highlight some of the work that Tulane has done in the field of infectious disease, particularly working to develop better vaccines and prevent outbreaks," Baker said. "We wanted to bring that knowledge to the public in an exhibit."

Outbreak is a local edition of a national effort. Last year on the 100th anniversary of the 1918 Great Influenza pandemic, The Smithsonian opened a national exhibit of Outbreak in Washington, D.C. to raise awareness of the human, animal and environmental factors contributing to infectious disease epidemics.