Dr. Fauci Reflects on the Perpetual Challenge of Infectious Diseases

Fauci, who has directed the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984, will step down in December.

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Once considered a potentially static field of medicine, the discipline of studying infectious diseases has proven to be dynamic as emerging and reemerging infectious diseases present continuous challenges, Anthony S. Fauci, MD, writes in a perspective in the New England Journal of Medicine.

In the piece, Dr. Fauci, who since 1984 has directed the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health, reflects on his career responding to infectious disease threats.

Dr. Fauci will step down from his positions as NIAID director, chief of NIAID's Laboratory of Immunoregulation and chief medical advisor to President Joe Biden in December 2022.

In the perspective, Dr. Fauci notes that the emergence of HIV/AIDS in 1981 led to a sharp increase in interest in infectious diseases among people entering the field of medicine. Since then, infectious disease specialists have faced numerous medical challenges, including the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, Ebola, Zika, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and COVID-19, he writes.

Although COVID-19 was "the loudest wake-up call in more than a century to our vulnerability to outbreaks of emerging infectious diseases," Dr. Fauci notes that one success of the response was the rapid development, testing and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines thanks to years of research and investment in new and highly adaptable vaccine platforms and structural biology tools to design vaccine immunogens.

These technological advances, among others, will greatly benefit the field of infectious diseases, he writes. He concludes by stressing the importance of improving capabilities to respond to established infectious diseases like malaria and tuberculosis while also responding to emerging threats.

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