This chapter is centered around an investigation of an outbreak of Hepatitis A among methamphetamine users in Polk County, Iowa in 1997. However, the main focus of this chapter was to demonstrate how cooperation between different departments, public health, the media, and law enforcement, can impact an investigation. The roles and perspectives of five individuals in these three different departments are shown throughout the investigation.

The investigators used the findings of a previous case-control study done on an outbreak of Hepatitis A in a different county in Iowa. These findings assisted them in identifying a target at-risk population, injected illicit drug users and men who had sexual relations with men, and instating useful control measures to prevent the outbreak from spreading. The current outbreak was concerned with a few isolated cases of food handlers contracting Hepatitis A and an increased number of individuals in the 23-38 age range contracting the virus. Through case-control studies the investigators were able to confirm the at-risk populations, identify potential modes of transmission, and enact effective control and awareness measures. In this section the importance of interdepartmental cooperation is stressed, as is the need to keep the public informed with accurate information.

Questions:
1) What could have been some possible outcomes/repercussions if the media had not been as understanding of health issues or as willing to oblige requests made by the press representative?
2) Drug users are a difficult population for an investigation. Why?
3) What is a “quick and dirty” epidemiologic investigation? What are the benefits? The drawbacks?
4) What are some reasons why it is important to maintain a good working relationship with the media? What are some ways in which this is accomplished?
5) Do you have any comments regarding the ad placed in the newspaper by a pharmaceutical company regarding the Hepatitis A vaccine and the newspapers response?
6) In this case, the interests of the press and public health officials coincided. If this were not the case, how might the investigation have been affected?
7) How do you think science is portrayed, in general, in the media?