In the spring of 1993, a previously undescribed disease emerged in the Southwest, killing 10 people during an 8-week period in May and June. Early during an infection, victims experienced flu-like symptoms for several days, but their condition suddenly and rapidly deteriorated as their lungs filled with fluids; death usually occurred within hours of the onset of this crisis period. There was no cure, no successful medication or treatment, and the disease agent (virus, bacterium, or toxin) was completely unknown. For the first few weeks, the mortality rate was 70%.

Researchers from many disciplines immediately focused on the outbreak, attempting to identify the agent and understand the causes and dynamics of the disease. Within weeks, scientists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified the agent as a previously unknown hantavirus (Bunyaviridae), subsequently named Sin Nombre virus, or SNV (Nichol et al. 1993). Because hantaviruses were known to be transmitted by rodents, investigators undertook an intensive small mammal field sampling campaign in the Four Corners region of New Mexico and Arizona. Shortly thereafter, CDC identified the viral reservoir host as a common and widely distributed rodent, the deer mouse, *Peromyscus maniculatus* (figure 1; Childs et al. 1994). During the identification period, on the medical side, physicians and medical staff made rapid progress in developing treatment methods to stabilize and sustain patients through the crisis period, thereby substantially improving patient survivorship; nonetheless, the mortality rate fell only to about 40%, where it remains today.

The emergence of this new disease prompted many questions about its history, causes, and dynamics. Was this a newly