

Book review

New and Resurgent Infections: Prediction, Detection and Management of Tomorrow's Epidemics, Brian Greenwood, Kevin De Cock (Eds.), Wiley, 1998

The scientific community is becoming increasingly concerned with the emergence and re-emergence of new infectious diseases. This is strongly catalyzed by the anxiety of the public. The public concern is fueled by the sensational reporting in the media. They are more concerned with the one in a million chance of acquiring some of these infections, e.g. Ebola, than the much more likely risk of being involved in a serious car accident.

The serious nature of these problems necessitates the need to address them and find effective control measures. Their importance was emphasized by declaring the theme of World Health Day 1997 as, 'Emerging Infectious Diseases—Global Alert, Global Response'. An international meeting on emerging infections in the Asia-Pacific region was held in Bangkok in March, 1997. It was observed that, 'the gap between the enormity of the impending infectious disease problem and the available tools (for control) is widening, and the need for a comprehensive response is urgent' (Mahmoud et al., 1998).

The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine decided to devote its 1997 Annual Public Health Forum to the subject of new and resurgent infections. They gathered, in addition to their own staff, world leaders in the field from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the US Department of Agriculture, the World Health Organization, and others from the devel-

oped and developing countries. The proceedings are published in the eminently readable book, *New and Resurgent Infections: Prediction, Detection and Management of Tomorrow's Epidemics*. The book 'seeks to identify professional and institutional responses that are most likely to be effective in reducing threats to public health from new and resurgent infections'. Those most affected are the poorest 25% of the world population. Tremendous progress has been made in our lifetime through antibiotics, antivirals and vaccines in control of infectious diseases, but we are now being faced with a growing number of problems, due to resistance and environmental factors, such as AIDS, tuberculosis, Ebola, Marburg, Lassa, diphtheria, dengue, new variant Creutzfeldt–Jacob (nvCJD), campylobacter, non-typhoid salmonella, typhoid, paratyphoid, verotoxinogenic *E. coli*, even plague, malaria, yellow fever, shigellosis, trypanosomiasis and staphylococcus.

The book begins with a thoughtful presentation on how diseases emerge and/or re-emerge. The point is made that the problem we face today is not a new one. It is just harder to pass unnoticed. As recently as the 1950s a yellow fever epidemic, which killed 50000 in Ethiopia went unnoticed until it was over. This would not happen today. The emergence of new infectious disease problems often have simple, rather than exotic, explanations. These include: local, historical, global, behavioral, cultural, environmental, ecological, social, economic, and climate changes; all well addressed in early chapters of the book. The middle chapters address individual emerging

problems, their causes, and possible control measures. There is an excellent chapter on the role of antibiotic resistance, as well as chapters on whether viruses such as Ebola, Lassa, dengue, HIV, nvCJD are new or emerging viruses, citing reasons for the conclusions reached and the control measures suggested. Sometimes the picture is not a rosy one as discussed in the chapter on dengue. There is a comprehensive chapter on the revived interest in food poisoning. The final chapters address the economics of the problem and what must be done to deal with it. There is a need for international cooperation including: surveillance, diagnosis, prevention, research and a plan for a coordinated response to an emergent problem.

This book is highly recommended for all readers interested in this problem including government officials, scientists and even the casual reader.

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References

- Mahmoud, A.A.F., LaMontagne, J., Takeda, Y., 1998. J. Infect. Dis. 177, 3–4.