Reviews and Resources

BOOK

Forgotten People, Forgotten Diseases: The Neglected Tropical Diseases and Their Impact on Global Health and Development


As the Lead Ambassador for the Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases, Peter Hotez has produced a fascinating and informative book about the world’s neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), the most common diseases among the poorest people. He begins the story by introducing us to three landmark 21st-century policy documents related to global health: the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health, charged with analyzing the relationship between disease and chronic poverty; the United Nations Millennium Declaration, a renewed call for sustainable development and for the eradication of poverty; and the third, the Report of the Commission for Africa, which served as an important blueprint for commitments by the Group of Eight (G8) nations at their 2005 summit in Scotland. These documents continue to exert a major influence on global policymakers, including the stimulus for high-level efforts to invent innovative financial instruments for supporting disease control, including funding initiatives from the G8 nations and prominent private philanthropic organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

NTDs have several common features. They are highly prevalent within the poorest people in developing countries; there is a link between NTDs and rural poverty; they are ancient and nonemerging conditions, which tend to be chronic and often cause disability and disfigurement; they are often stigmatizing, causing individuals to be ostracized by their families and communities; and they cause a high disease burden, but low mortality. If one examines the disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), the number of healthy life years lost from premature death or disability, the NTDs fall second to HIV/AIDS, with malaria and tuberculosis being third and fourth, respectively.

A series of chapters address the NTDs, including soil-transmitted helminth infections (ascariasis, trichuriasis, and hookworm infections), schistosomiasis (snail fever), filariasis (elephantiasis), onchocerciasis (river blindness), dracunculiasis (guinea worm infection) trachoma, mycobacterial infections, trypanosomiasis (African trypanosomiasis, Chagas’ disease), leishmaniasis, dengue, leptospirosis, and rabies. The chapters are well-illustrated with diagrams, maps, and summary tables. The diseases are discussed in terms of what they are, where they occur, who they impact, when they occur, clinical findings, why they are such a problem, and possible control measures. The book is very easy to read and contains the major concepts about the NTDs, including how they cause human suffering and their overall global importance. The title of the book was taken from a 2002 paper on helminth infections written by David Crompton and Michael Nesheim in the Annual Review of Nutrition, in which they quoted the phrase “forgotten diseases of forgotten people” (attributed to M. G. Schultz).

Hotez emphasizes the opportunities we have to control these neglected tropical diseases using existing drugs, safer and more effective newer drugs, and new “anti-poverty vaccines” being developed in nonprofit research laboratories. This book will provide excellent information for anyone interested in tropical infectious diseases and global health, including graduate students, teachers, volunteers, policy advocates, health care professionals, and others involved with tropical medicine. The book is reasonably priced, highly recommended, and provides an excellent review of the global status of neglected tropical diseases.

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Correction

In the Journal Highlights for the June 2009 issue, p. 289, “Type III Secretion System Mapped in Vibrio cholerae,” the quote attributed to Sandqvist should have been attributed to Lybarger. In the photo accompanying that highlight, the author on the right is incorrectly identified as Sandqvist and should be Johnson. Microbe regrets the errors.