

Perspectives on helminthology

Edited by N. Chowdury and I. Tada
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Veterinarians in high-income countries have long been engaged in controlling disease due to worm infections in live-stock. These infections have a quantifiable economic impact and it makes good sense to spend money on cost-effective remedies such as the regular administration of modern anthelmintic drugs. No doubt veterinarians working in low-income countries would wish to see the same approach adopted. When we consider the extent of worm-induced disease in humans the problems and challenges seem to be more serious and more intractable because of the many demands on the health budgets of developing countries. Human helminthiasis thrives where poverty is entrenched. Who will pay for the drugs so urgently needed to reduce the burden of disease in millions of deprived people living in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and elsewhere? Who will cover the costs of providing the extensive health education, safe drinking-water and appropriate sanitation, the investment needed to sustain a largely worm-free world?

With these thoughts in mind, I noted with satisfaction that, in both the Dedication and the Preface of *Perspectives on helminthology*, the editors had focused on “the alleviation of suffering in both humans and animal (sic)”. However, the 531 pages of text appear mainly to offer another compendium of existing knowledge; there was little to convince me that the publication of this book would advance our knowledge of how to implement helminth control. On the other hand, if much of the information is not readily available in some places, this volume will serve a useful purpose as a reference work for senior undergraduate and postgraduate students, especially in Asia, if the publisher can make it available there at an affordable price.

With my current interest, chapter 5, on the Epidemiology and Control of Helminthiasis of Humans, is the pick of the contributions. It deals directly with the latest science and explains how this knowledge can be used to underpin the strategic planning required to reduce morbidity in humans caused by worm infections. Chapter 17 is also intriguing because it sets out what we know about vaccine development. Affordable vaccination is a potential way of dealing with drug resistance, which is now widespread in the worms infecting animals, and may be on the verge of emerging in some of the worms infecting humans. This is not intended to imply that new drugs are no longer needed. Treatment for human schistosomiasis now depends largely on praziquantel, which has been found in experimental conditions to be ineffective against juvenile worms migrating through the tissues. Sufferers will be in serious difficulty if praziquantel-resistant worms arise under natural conditions. Incidentally, given the importance of praziquantel and the amount of interest there is in it, I was surprised not to be able to find any reference to it in the index.

There is a welcome blend of tropical and temperate parasitology in the book. Each of the other 15 chapters has its merits and provides a detailed, interesting and comprehensive review of some aspect of helminthology. These include a rather esoteric discourse on evolution and the origins of parasitism, a concise summary of helminth biochemistry, and a descriptive account of helminth ultrastructure. I wondered why the volume included 11 lines on the evolution of the Acanthocephala, based on two references, the most recent of which was published in 1967. Recent molecular evidence points to this group having phylogenetic affinities with rotifers. In any case, acanthocephalans have yet to pose a threat to the health of humans and livestock, especially when compared with schistosomes, filarial worms and other nematodes.

The standard of production of the book does not appear to do justice to the enthusiasm of the editors and the effort made by the contributors in researching and preparing their chapters. The quality of the reproduction of electron micrographs and the satellite (GIS) images is poor. The index states that bold type indicates pages with illustrations or tables. Not so in all cases; for example, chapter 5 contains 17 figures and five tables none of which can be identified in the index. Frankly, this index, subdivided according to chapter headings, did not work for me. Again in chapter 5, the authors discuss lymphatic filariasis from pages 205 to 210, but I could not find that section by reference to the index. There are spelling mistakes. “Helminthiasis”, “*contrortus*”, “generic (genetic?)”, “nematode”, “*Nematospiruroides*”, “super-numery”, “*brasiliense*”, “heamonchosis” and “*trichuria*” stood out without my making any effort to find them.

Nevertheless, I am pleased to recommend this informative book to established and apprenticed helminthologists alike. Our subject will not grow unless we publish our knowledge and stimulate others to learn. Human suffering will not be relieved unless we share our knowledge and concerns with more young scientists. That sharing is the strength of this book. ■

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Acute respiratory infection — interactive tutorials, image collection

CD-ROM by Wellcome Trust
Textual content and images by Tropical Medicine Resource.
Price: institutions £120 / \$195;
individuals £30 / US\$ 55
Further information at: www.cabi-publishing.org/cdrom/TIH/price.htm

A host of authors are here with their version of “Everything you always wanted to know about acute respiratory infection (ARI) and were afraid to ask”.

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Interactive tutorials, though not explicitly humorous, will certainly make the task of learning a little more interesting. Judging by the technicality of the language, the target audience is primarily undergraduate and postgraduate medical students. ARI continues to kill millions of children all over the developing world, and medical students in the countries most concerned are usually given an exposure to the subject, which is, to put it mildly, inadequate. This set of tutorials and images is therefore a highly valuable and welcome resource.

Like a small flying saucer, the CD takes us on a detailed guided tour of the world of ARI. Starting with a brief overview of the major sections, it moves us through ten highly interactive tutorials, each composed and reviewed by a team of experts, renowned for their contribution to the field of ARI. Each tutorial is followed by a self-administered assessment. The topics of the tutorials are: etiology and risk factors, pathology, respiratory defenses, clinical features, diagnosis, case management, epidemiology, and prevention and control. The final tutorial provides detailed information on ARI programme management and surveillance.

The objective is to introduce students to the global significance of respiratory illnesses and then provide all the information they may need on any of its aspects. After drawing attention to a particular aspect of ARI, the authors review the options in a clear and straightforward way, and explore the relevant details. They focus on the peculiarities of childhood ARI, explaining why morbidity and mortality are higher in this age group. Promoting a rational approach to case management, they stress the need to recognize cases for which the use of antibiotics is appropriate and justified. They highlight the importance of preventive strategies and the various obstacles encountered in efforts to implement them.

Greatly helping the authors to make their points are visuals in the form of photographs, video clips and animations. The entire presentation is interesting, user-friendly and visually pleasing, so it should do the students good by cutting down their yawning rate and caffeine intake, in addition to

achieving its desired objective of providing very useful information on ARI.

However, at the end of each chapter, where the authors administer a test to assess the students' depth of knowledge, they do not always meet their objectives. Especially in view of the degree of detail that has been provided, some of the questions cannot be answered properly in the space available. This does not give students a fair chance to assess their level of knowledge accurately. The slides, on the other hand, are designed in an interesting manner, and add a bit of fun to the test.

Considering the role and contribution of health workers in the management of ARI in developing countries, it is a pity that so many of them will not be able to benefit from this wonderful CD, because of the highly technical nature of its language. It would certainly be worth the effort to produce a second CD on ARI, designed for community health workers. It would involve simplifying the language of this one and putting in more visuals so that the less educated health workers, and as a result the entire community, can also benefit from this wealth of information on ARI. ■

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Erratum

On page 2, of Vol. 80, No. 1, the affiliations of the authors N.V. Hung & A. Naficy should read: N.V. Hung, Professor, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Hanoi, Viet Nam. A. Naficy, Epidemiologist, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Bethesda, Maryland, USA.

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