Viral Infections in the Respiratory Tract
(Lung Biology in Health and Disease Volume 127)

R. Dolin and P. F. Wright, Eds.
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The stated aim of this book is to provide virological insight to the doctor with no formal training in infectious diseases and it could certainly be recommended as pertinent reading for respiratory physicians and intensive care practitioners. Information is presented in an accessible way that enables the reader to acquire knowledge without having to read the whole book. Inevitably this means that if the book is read from cover to cover there is a large amount of repetition.

Individual viruses are comprehensively covered with detailed description of the mechanisms of viral replication, pathogenesis, host immune response and epidemiology. Description of disease caused by viral pathogens, how the virus adapts to ensure its own survival and specific problems associated with individual agents allow the reader to understand the complex interaction between host and organism. The impact of respiratory viral disease during each phase of life is discussed and a chapter devoted to the immunocompromised patient is a valuable inclusion, detailing the consequence and severity of respiratory viral infections in these individuals. Where modern medicine has been defeated by the pathogen, as in the case of respiratory syncytial virus vaccination, the reasons for failure are considered and future prevention strategies presented. The reader is also acquainted with recently discovered viral agents associated with respiratory disease, i.e. hantavirus. Although the background relating to the discovery of the agent causing hantavirus pulmonary syndrome is only briefly alluded to, the chapter provides detailed description of the virus, disease and treatment strategies of this new syndrome.

A chapter devoted to diagnosis of viral infections outlines the basic science behind diagnostic tests and new technologies such as PCR are mentioned. However, the strengths and weaknesses of the individual methodologies are only briefly discussed, as are the advances in molecular methods and the potential impact of amplification techniques on diagnosis. Management of respiratory viral infections is dealt with in each chapter and in a broader context in a chapter dedicated to therapy; immunocompromised patients is given special consideration. Prevention of viral infections are detailed in the final chapter which also concisely outlines strategies for the control of the next influenza A pandemic. Perhaps more consideration could have been given to new approaches for vaccine design. I feel also, that a chapter devoted to infection control issues related to viral respiratory pathogens would have been a useful addition to the book, in particular in the context of immunosuppressed patients.

The question that should be asked of this book is whether it adds useful clinical insights that are unobtainable in standard virological texts to readers who specialize in laboratory based microbiology/virology. In common with books which traverse specialities it is difficult to please all factions and I feel there is little new information here for the well-informed virologist.

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