Forgotten People, Forgotten Diseases: The Neglected Tropical Diseases and Their Impact on Global Health and Development. 2d ed.

By Peter Hotez.

“A civilization is judged by the treatment of its minorities.”

Mahatma Gandhi

This quotation appears late in Peter Hotez’s Forgotten People, Forgotten Diseases, but its call to action issues forth from every page of this entertaining and often fascinating book. Forgotten People tells the story of the 17 neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and chronicles the successes and failures in controlling these diseases worldwide.

For those less experienced in tropical disease, I can think of no better book to introduce the field. For the more seasoned tropical disease physicians and those familiar with Hotez’s work in the field, including his numerous publications in The New England Journal of Medicine, PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases, and Vaccine, the book will serve as a highly readable review of the history, epidemiology, and basic science of the world’s NTDs, as well as policy concerns.

Forgotten People, Forgotten Diseases provides updates on each of the 17 NTDs, including progress toward disease control, elimination or eradication, the history of treatments and medications, and future directions in medication and vaccine development. This is not a tropical disease textbook, however. For that level of scientific depth and detail, one may turn to Manson’s Tropical Diseases (22nd ed), or Guerrant’s Tropical Infectious Diseases: Principles, Pathogens, and Practice (3rd ed).

The book contains 12 brief chapters, complete with helpful chapter summaries, quotes, images, descriptions of parasite life cycles from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and World Health Organization (WHO) global epidemiology maps. Hotez traces the origins of the NTDs to the year 2000, when Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University highlighted the link between disease and chronic poverty, and the United Nations released its 8 Millennium Development Goals. In 2005, a working group proposed the original 13 NTDs, which WHO expanded to 17.

An introductory chapter is followed by chapters devoted to either a grouping of related NTDs or a single NTD. Chapter 1, one of the book’s strongest, opens with the Elie Wiesel quote “the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference” and chronicles the origins of this 21st century global health movement. A chapter on the soil-transmitted helminthic infections ascariasis, trichuriasis, and hookworm follows, with emphasis on Hotez’s extensive work on hookworm, which infects 600 million persons in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and the tropical Americas. This section introduces a recurring theme among the NTDs—their poverty promoting features—and highlights the anemia, low birth weight, growth delay, and cognitive decline resulting from chronic hookworm infection. The book concludes with a chapter on hookworm and Hotez’s current leadership role in the Human Hookworm Vaccine Initiative at the Texas Children’s Hospital Center for Vaccine Development at Baylor College of Medicine. In between, chapters on schistosomiasis, filarial infections, and the blinding NTDs onchocerciasis and trachoma are followed by the mycobacterial infections Buruli ulcer and leprosy, the kinetoplastid infections trypanosomiasis, Chagas disease, and leishmaniasis, and the urban NTDs leptospirosis, dengue, and rabies. A chapter on the NTDs of North America (toxocariasis, cysticercosis, Chagas disease, and strongyloidiasis) recounts the historical impact of urbanization on decreasing infections previously endemic to the southeastern United States (soil-transmitted helminthic infection, malaria, typhoid, and yellow fever).

Another interesting example of medical history in Forgotten People recounts the impact of schistosomiasis in Mao’s postrevolution China. People’s Liberation Army troops were infected while undergoing water training in the eastern Yangtze River in preparation for an assault on Taiwan (then Formosa), which delayed the assault and cleared the way for US forces to enter the Strait of Formosa. Other interesting stories of medical anthropology enriching Forgotten People include the origin of diethyldibarbamazine-fortified salt for lymphatic filariasis and a history of leprosy (possibly the first infectious disease described) from biblical times to the Hansen’s Disease Center in Louisiana, closed in 1999.

One of the strengths of the book and Hotez’s work is the structure that defining the NTDs provides for this group of often-overlooked diseases, creating a framework for the important work of disease control. Hotez tells the story of a movement—how advocacy is done on a global scale—and his book is a vehicle for this work. Forgotten People opens a window onto the politics and policy side of infectious disease, and critics may find an overemphasis on policy issues and feel occasionally overwhelmed by the naming of so many organizations and reoccurring lists of diseases, acronyms, and figures. The multitude of persons, groups, and institutions, however, stresses the importance of connectedness in medicine and public policy. Little is accomplished alone, readers are reminded, and Hotez remains unapologetic in his advocacy for more exposure for the NTDs, and more support. To date, 250 million persons have been treated with all or part of a “rapid impact package” for 7 NTDs, and the WHO estimates that more than 700 million have received treatment for NTDs in “some of the largest public health control efforts ever undertaken.”

Hotez argues, based on the metric of disability-adjusted life-years that the worldwide impact of the NTDs is comparable.
to that of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/AIDS, malaria, diarrheal diseases, and tuberculosis—possibly because of the chronic, stigmatizing, and poverty-promoting nature of the NTDs. In chapter 10, he proposes bundling care for the NTDs with HIV care, which has become a major goal at Baylor.

Looking ahead, the END7 campaign targets public health efforts for the world’s 7 most prevalent NTDs, including ascariasis, trichuriasis, hookworm, schistosomiasis, lymphatic filariasis, trachoma, and onchocerciasis. Perhaps more than anything else, for the 17 NTDs and the world’s suffering poor, Hotez’s book and career provide a framework for action, a blueprint for global efforts to control these ancient scourges of humanity.

**Note**

*Potential conflicts of interest.* Author certifies no potential conflicts of interest.

The author has submitted the ICMJE Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest.