The Oxford Textbook of Medicine, now in its fifth edition published in 2010, is widely considered one of the most informative and comprehensive books in medicine, covering both scientific aspects and clinical practice. Individual sections of this book are regularly updated and expanded, and the current book under review was published in 2012 as a stand-alone volume of the Infection section of the textbook.

The editors of this volume invited 152 authors to prepare chapters on various topics related to infection, ranging from the description of the fundamentals of infection and response (e.g. pathogenicity of infectious agents, host reactions and immunization strategies), to disease detection and distribution (e.g. epidemiology, laboratory-based diagnostics and clinical approaches), to treatment options and prevention and control (e.g. antimicrobial chemotherapy and usage of vaccines). The authors look at classical, emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, modern plagues, and tropical diseases. Furthermore, they discuss infectious diseases caused by globalization and travel, and nosocomial and other healthcare-associated diseases.

The book contains 13 chapters which are divided into subsections. In the first four chapters, the authors describe the biology of pathogenic microorganisms and the host (Chapter 1), the challenges and opportunities associated with the management of patients with suspected infections (Chapter 2), currently licensed vaccines as well as the development of new vaccines and immunization programmes (Chapter 3) and infection risks surrounding travel of tourists, business people, educators, wilderness explorers, pilgrims and others (Chapter 4). Not surprisingly, most space in this book is allotted to the description of diseases caused by infectious agents such as viruses, bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes, cestodes, trematodes, nonvenomous arthropods, and pentastomids (i.e. crustacean parasites) (Chapters 5–13).

The organization of most chapters and subsections follows a similar framework, beginning with a brief summary of the topic (‘Essentials’) and followed by an introduction. Then specific issues are discussed, for example the aetiology and epidemiology of disease, the pathological and clinical features, laboratory findings, the clinical diagnosis of the infectious disease, issues related to the prognosis and treatment, and options for prevention and control. This framework can help physicians and infectious disease trainees to easily access and compare information about specific diseases and guide them through the process of patient care. The well-developed table of contents and the functional 28-page index further allow for fast and accurate access to information.

I found that some microbiological aspects, such as the general ecosystems of microbes associated with infection or the description of disease transmission mechanisms, could have been discussed in more detail; however, I understand that the major focus of this textbook is on the description of the medical aspects of infection—hence the name: Oxford Textbook of Medicine: Infection. Although the authors mention in many instances the epidemiology of infectious diseases [e.g. the approximate geographical distribution of the West Nile virus (p. 172), the world distribution of HIV (p. 228), outbreaks of different serogroups of Neisseria meningitidis (p. 321) or the WHO-estimated global tuberculosis incidence rates ([p. 428]), I found only a few paragraphs in the book in which the authors describe epidemiological methods leading to these data. An example of such a description is the evaluation of immunization programmes [i.e. how to measure vaccine coverage, perform disease surveillance, conduct seroprevalence studies and monitor adverse events (pp. 58–59)]. Although I consider this a shortcoming of this volume, I realize that the Oxford Textbook series includes the Oxford Textbook of Public Health, which extensively covers methods used in epidemiology and public health.

One of the many strengths of this book is the use of over 250 illustrations (e.g. photographs of the clinical presentation of infectious diseases, images of pathology sections, X-rays, ultrasounds, MRIs and CTs and light and electron micrographs of infectious agents, as well as tables, diagrams, maps and flow charts), which are all of very high quality, and most are in colour. Also, the selection of the figures and their positioning within the text are outstanding, which helps the reader to easily understand a particular topic without having to search for the assigned illustration(s). Furthermore, I like the many checklists [e.g. the list on respiratory tract viruses with classification, incubation periods, duration of infectivity and diagnostic options (p. 71), the principal complications of untreated HIV infection as well as antiretroviral drug therapies and options for the prophylaxis of major opportunistic infections in HIV with first-line and alternative regimens (pp. 243–249), or the 36-page list of bacteria associated with infection, and the reported susceptibilities and treatments...
have bravely and openly shared some of their experiences about their lives. The book is very visual, with absorbing photographs that capture the lives of the authors. This is not a heavy read about the physical realities of disability, rather it is a moving and inspiring collection of how life can be rebuilt to be purposeful and fulfilling. The book portrays what can be done rather than what cannot. Although the book was written to help new spinally injured people to see that there can be life after injury, it is a book with much wider appeal. Friends and family of newly injured spinal patients also suffer terribly when these tragedies happen. The lives of the individuals in this book portray such a positive image of potential futures that reading it will be of great benefit to those close to recently injured spinal patients. Moreover, the individuals in the book project such a positive, pragmatic image of living with disability that anyone who picks up a copy would be moved and have their attitudes to disability changed.

From reading the 25 stories, one of the strongest themes that comes through is not the challenge of dealing with the physical realities of disability but rather dealing with the limitations that others try to impose on them. Many of the stories in the book highlight that it is other able-bodied people that often hold them back. Disabled people have no