BOOKS

Introducing Undergraduates to Global Health Epidemiology, Emerging Infectious Diseases, and Parasitology: A Small Book with a Big Impact
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Review of: Forgotten People, Forgotten Diseases: The Neglected Tropical Diseases and their Impact on Global Health and Development, 2nd Edition; Peter J. Hotez; (2013). ASM Press, Washington, DC. 255 pages.

I’ll be honest: Hotez had me at the title. I had to read this book for two reasons: 1) I lead a service-learning trip to Nicaragua each summer for Biology majors who are planning healthcare careers, so I’ve wanted to find a text that introduces the biology of a variety of tropical diseases beyond the basic symptomology, lifecycle, and treatment gambit, and 2) I wanted to change direction with my literature-based senior inquiry/capstone course (my institution no longer offers a parasitology course, so the topic of worm and protozoan diseases is appealing). Initially, I didn’t expect this slim volume to deliver so much content nor be organized to facilitate undergraduate learning. I have not read the first edition of the book, so I do not know if these attributes new to this edition, but I think I’ve found the core text for my next senior capstone class.

Forgotten People, Forgotten Diseases covers a broad array of protozoan, helminth, bacterial, and a few viral
infections, but sandwiches the neglected tropical disease (NTD) chapters between a big picture introduction and some “where do we go from here” concepts in Chapters 10 to 12. The introduction urges readers to look past the biology of NTDs (picture students “oohing and aahing” as they learn the pathology of dracunculiasis) and realize the vicious cycle of poverty and social stigma that keep one billion of the world’s poorest people from achieving a better quality of life. Most college students in developed nations have no idea of the global burden of disease due to NTDs, but Hotez vividly outlines this. More importantly, in the last few chapters, Hotez offers us hope through future interventions against NTDs, including information on existing global programs, research paths for “anti-poverty vaccines,” and a call to action to “repair the world” through new “government-academic-industrial” partnerships addressing NTDs.

Hotez groups the specific diseases into eight tidy chapters, with unifying themes such as “The Filarial Infections,” “The Blinding NTDs,” and “The Urban NTDs.” This organization provides undergraduates with a framework so that students can base their studying upon the morphologic, geographic, and symptomatic descriptors used as chapter themes. Each chapter uses quotes from people living with an NTD (including Charles Darwin who may have suffered from chronic Chagas’ disease) to help bring messages into focus and includes an extensive set of endnotes with detailed statistics and citations for more complex concepts, making the text both readable and engrossing. As a professor, I value the bulleted list of “Summary Points” at the end of each chapter which offers another level of scaffolding useful for any reader, but especially for undergraduates.

In summary, Forgotten People, Forgotten Diseases is an engaging read and uses specific vocabulary and images, making it a good choice for the upper-level undergraduate classroom or as a primer for any interested biologist or healthcare professional. The resource list is comprehensive and the topic index is thorough but still user-friendly. Hotez shows that an interdisciplinary approach is required for a broad-based problem, which makes this text appropriate for either upper-level public/global health courses or an elective in biology. Such courses are necessary and becoming more common, given collaborative work in response to recommendations by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies that “all undergraduates should have access to education in public health” (1).

REFERENCES

1. Gebbie, K., L. Rosenstock, and L. M. Hernandez. 2003. Who will keep the public healthy? Educating public health professionals for the 21st century. The National Academies Press, Washington, DC. 144.

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