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Book review

Zoonoses Second Edition

Zoonoses. Martin Shakespeare, Second Edition. Pharmaceutical Press; 2009; Hardcover, 289 pages, ISBN: 978-0-85369-753-4.

Zoonoses (second edition), by Martin Shakespeare, is an engaging read that provides a broad introduction to the world of zoonotic infections. This 289 page edition was published by Pharmaceutical Press in 2009.

The book begins with a general discussion of the principles of zoonotic infections and then proceeds to examine individual entities according to the reservoir animal population that houses them or according to the type of infectious agent involved (virus, prion, etc.). There are also individual chapters on emerging or evolving zoonoses, foodborne zoonoses, and finally a concluding chapter regarding the implications on healthcare and the burden of zoonotic disease.

Most pathogens are described according to a set framework, with sections on basic epidemiology, disease in animals, disease transmission, disease in humans, diagnosis, and treatment. Interspersed among these is a small collection of interesting case studies, some which will be recognizable to any reader from recent media reports, along with a running commentary on the regulatory framework and public health efforts to contain zoonotic infection.

The sections on regulatory bodies and healthcare infection control measures do tend to limit the external utility of the book as it is very much centred on the UK, which is not surprising given the origins of the author. A few sections in particular can be tedious to read as a result, however for the general reading audience these sections do provide insight into the practicalities and difficulties of managing a problem with such a multi-faceted nature and which affects such a wide cross section of the population.

It is difficult to be comprehensive in any introductory book when faced with such an immense topic as zoonotic infections and, as an introduction, this text serves quite well to acquaint learners with most of the significant infectious agents. Several holes do exist, such as omissions regarding certain rickettsial agents and a rather cursory chapter on viral pathogens. Again, some of this can likely be explained given the author’s regional interests and the fact that a lot of our historical and epidemiological data are gathered from the records of developed countries. On the other hand, the book is certainly up to date with regards to recent emerging zoonoses, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), West Nile virus, and avian influenza, and devotes a significant number of pages to describing them and the challenges that are emerging in their management.

Zoonoses (second edition), is aimed at healthcare professionals and trainees. As the author states in the introduction to the last chapter, the broadest possible knowledge base and skill set in healthcare practice is always a boon to both patients and colleagues, and this book strives to further that point. However, any health professional with an interest in the management of zoonotic infections should use this book as an introductory text and a jumping off point to explore these diseases in more depth with further study. Regardless, it is an enjoyable read for anyone interested in learning about this branch of medicine, whether it be with regards to the subject as a whole, or to obtain a useful clinical summary regarding a particular agent.

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