

The next phase in global health

Global public health: a new era. Robert Beaglehole (editor). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003 (xx + 284 pp, \$89.95). ISBN 0 19851529 4.

THOSE OF US trained as “curative” practitioners should pause to take note of this book, which gives an account of many awesome phenomena. These include:

- the terrible inequalities and worsening health figures in many countries;
- the importance of non-medical factors (such as schooling for girls) in achieving better health outcomes;
- a disgraceful rise in tobacco marketing and in the incidence of tobacco-related disease in developing countries;
- unipolar depression as the greatest cause of chronic disability in developed countries;
- the destruction of our fragile biosphere;
- health outcomes in Canada consistently outperforming those in the United States; and
- the political nature of many of our problems.

Many of us practise some preventive medicine, such as vaccination and providing lifestyle advice — but as adjunctive activities. This is a book for those interested in the next steps in public health. It is not, nor does it pretend to be, a first book. It does not study the rudiments of public health. It points to new and different world problems. It identifies important influences in our previous “golden” century of progress and other influences that will be important this century.

However, the text lacks a discussion of the possible consequences for local and international economies of acting on some of the strategies advocated by public health practitioners. Thus, if universal immunisation was achieved, avoidable child mortality would drop and nations would then have to provide more schools, more teachers, more roads, more hospitals, more clean water, more food, more social services and so on. None of these downstream consequences is developed adequately.

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Disasters and mental health

Terrorism and disaster. Individual and community mental health interventions. Robert J Ursano, Carol S Fullerton, Ann E Norwood (editors). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003 (xii + 349 pp + CD-ROM, \$140). ISBN 0 521 53345 7.

THE AUDACIOUS ATROCITY of 11 September 2001 has spawned a number of books of varying quality and political perspective. It was inevitable that one would appear on the psychiatric impact of terrorism and technological disasters, and discuss interventions to prevent or ameliorate their devastating psychological effects.

The contributions in this edited collection are extraordinarily uneven in quality. There are some outstanding chapters — such as the astute and intellectually rigorous account by Simon Wessley of screening in the prevention of traumatic psychiatric disorders, and the wide-ranging review of “debriefing” by Beverley Raphael, with its blunt message, empathically delivered, regarding the ineffectiveness of this intervention. There is also a complex and very thoughtful chapter by Weisaeth and Tonnesen on technological disasters and radiation exposure.

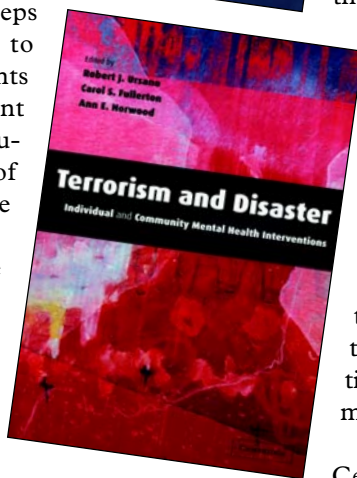
Interestingly, the better chapters come from authors outside the United States. The American contributors, many of whom are affiliated with the military, convey an air of earnest self-absorption coupled with seemingly cathartic self-disclosure, muted expressions of shock over their homeland having become a terrorist target, and a naïve optimism about the effectiveness of treatment for severe post-traumatic psychological morbidity.

Much attention is paid to the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi, the Oklahoma City bombing and the attack on the USS *Cole*. By contrast, there is hardly a word about Bhopal, Omagh, the Tokyo sarin gas attack, the Rwanda genocide, Chernobyl, or, indeed, the 1982 bombing and siege of Beirut.

Although, under the circumstances, this is understandable, it does make for an overall lack of balance and gives an introspective feel that limits its usefulness and interest to non-American readers. Perhaps, with more time to fully digest what has happened to America, a more broadly based collection on the same subject, but with a more uniform quality and international appeal, will be published. This is certainly *not* that book.

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