

Flu facts

Rapid Reference: Influenza.

Jan Wilschut, Janet E McElhaney. London: Mosby, 2004 (viii + 216 pp, \$41.80). ISBN 0 7 234 3385 2.

CULMINATING IN THE 2004 South-East Asian H5N1 outbreak, successive clusters, since 1997, of human infection with highly pathogenic avian influenza strains, have underscored the enormous potential public health threat posed by influenza, and the pressing need for effective control.

The theme of this book is the growing threat from an influenza pandemic. It includes reference to events up to mid-2004 in Asia, which gives it a topical feel despite the familiarity of much of the subject matter. The book is constructed along traditional lines, with chapters on virus structure and replication, antigenic drift and shift, the immune response, pathogenesis, clinical features and diagnosis, social and economic impact, vaccination, treatment and prophylaxis, and novel developments in influenza control.

There is much to like about this little book. It provides an extremely concise, yet thorough, and generally well balanced overview of influenza. The content is factually accurate, and it is very well referenced. The presentation is attractive and engaging with

lots of well executed graphics and tables, and lists of key messages for each chapter presented in sidebars. The authors, an infectious diseases physician and a molecular virologist, have each published extensively on influenza-related topics.

However, although the stated target audience is the general practitioner, the book covers rather more virology and immunology than would probably interest most readers, while combining pathogenesis, clinical presentation and

laboratory diagnosis in a single chapter. At one and a half pages, the coverage of laboratory diagnosis in particular is a little sketchy. Vaccination and therapy are covered in greater depth in individual chapters.

This book could be thoroughly recommended to anyone interested in an approachable and up-to-date concise overview of influenza. However, the relative brevity of the coverage of presentation and diagnosis might diminish its attraction to a general practitioner readership.

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