

Zoonoses

Ed: Palmer SR, Lord Soulsby, Simpson DIH

*Oxford University Press, 18/F Warwick House East, Taikoo Place, 979 King's Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong
HK\$2140.00, pp 948, ISBN 0 19 262380 X*

Zoonoses is a comprehensive book on infections that has been compiled by more than 90 authors of various areas of expertise. Their aim is stated clearly in the preface—namely, to develop a coordinated medico-veterinary approach to investigating and controlling zoonoses. The book is divided into three sections according to aetiology: bacterial, chlamydial, and rickettsial zoonoses; viral zoonoses; and parasitic zoonoses. The disease nomenclature has been standardised, but allowance has also been made for well-established names of some diseases. Emphasis is placed on the epidemiology, agent, host and environmental relations, and the prevention and control of zoonoses. Diagnosis and treatment are also covered, although in less detail.

The alphabetical arrangement of the chapters within the three sections suggests the 'reference'

utility of this book, although the editor claims that the book is not meant to be all-inclusive. In particular, the epidemiological review of infections in some chapters is confined to discussing data from the United Kingdom or the United States, because fewer epidemiological data are available from other countries. Overall, *Zoonoses* is more useful as a reference for public health workers, veterinary workers, and microbiologists, than for clinicians and specialists in infectious diseases.

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Peer review in health sciences

Ed: Godlee F, Jefferson T

*BMJ Books, BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JR, United Kingdom
£30.00, pp 286, ISBN 0 7279 1181 3*

Peer review is used widely in the health sciences—for example, to award grants, to decide which research articles to publish, to monitor continuing medical education, to assess the quality of care, and to optimise the utilisation of facilities and services. But is peer review fair, effective, and efficient; can and should it be standardised; and how can its integrity be checked? *Peer Review in Health Sciences* gathers together the scant research that has been conducted so far on the effectiveness and methodology of peer review of grant applications and journal submissions, and attempts to make transparent this seemingly elusive but indispensable quality-control mechanism.

Because research into the peer review of grant applications has lagged behind that of editorial review, *Peer Review in Health Sciences* contains more detail

about the latter. Topics include current peer review practices, their inherent flaws and biases, how to be a reviewer, what happens after manuscript acceptance, and the challenges faced by editors of smaller journals. The increased global interest in improving the lengthy, conventional editorial peer review procedure (targeted and anonymous pre-paper publication review) and the wider acceptance of the discipline 'journalology' are timely. The Internet has transformed medical publishing, so that editorial peer review—unlike deciding how to fairly assign limited research funding—is no longer an analogous process that assigns limited publication space. The worldwide web now hosts an exclusively on-line medical journal (*Medscape General Medicine*, available at <<http://www.medscape.com>>) and a 'preprint' publication site <<http://clinmed.netprints.org>>, and it allows all

variations of review up to post-electronic publication on-line open review. Accordingly, *Peer Review in Health Sciences* presents some feasible and experimental on-line quality-control procedures and suggests areas of future research.

Godlee and Jefferson have provided an invaluable and concise all-round picture of peer review for researchers, authors, reviewers, publishers, editors, and readers. While it is too early to draw any firm conclusions, let alone to investigate the grant application–research publication cycle or the ‘publish or perish’

paradigm, one message is clear: peer review can be time-consuming and expensive. But we must remember who should ultimately benefit from changes in the review of grant applications and journal submissions—patients.

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The troubled helix: social and psychological implications of the new human genetics

Ed: Marteau T, Richards M

Cambridge University Press, The Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom
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The probe into the science of genetics, in particular human genetics, has in recent years increased by leaps and bounds, not only in the understanding of its intricacy, but also in its possible human application. Yet, to many—including students of medicine—much still remains a mystery if not nebulosity. Furthermore, the understanding and application of human genetics extend well beyond the boundaries of science and medicine. Instead, they border enormously into the realm of legal, moral, social, and psychological implications. *The Troubled Helix: Social and Psychological Implications of the New Human Genetics* is a collection of many authors’ thoughts on human genetics and aims to provide a comprehensive knowledge of the above areas.

Part I describes the devastating effects of some common diseases that are genetically related and for which an understanding of the genetic background could avoid possible prolonged psychological suffering or provide precautionary measures for earlier detection and treatment. Through accounts of personal experience, the harmful effects become more vivid and may influence, if not pave, the way for society to accept the future application of genetic engineering in controlled selected conditions. The selflessness and bravery of those who come forward to relate and recall their bitter experience must be given the highest accolade. Part II guides readers from the basics of human genetics to the more complex theories and

practices behind genetic sequencing and engineering, while Part III deals with the legal, ethical, social, and moral aspects of genetics.

It may be said that the new genetics is a double-edged sword, for while research to date has mapped out some of the benefits, there are worries that new developments could lead to a society that is less tolerant of disability and diversity. In Hong Kong, the debate on human genetics has scaled new heights, especially regarding human reproductive procedures using scientifically assisted technologies. Sex selection, biological engineering, use of foetal tissue, and the possibility of tissue cloning for transplantation are within the reach of the horizon. *The Troubled Helix: Social and Psychological Implications of the New Human Genetics* is not only a good beginner’s guide, but also a compendium perhaps even for professionals. It may be appropriate to conclude by quoting from the final passage: “We should not, and probably cannot anyway, stop further technical developments in the field. But we must not be passive and let the technological tail wag the societal dog. We must join the debate and help to negotiate the kind of future we all want.”

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