



BOOK REVIEWS

Climate Change and Human Health. Risks and Responses

By DH Campbell-Lendrum, CF Corvalan, K L Ebi, A Githeko, J D Scheraga and A Woodward. Pp. xi + 322. Sw.fr.20./US\$18. WHO. 2003. ISBN 92-4-156248X. (Available from SAMA-HMPG. Price R140, members R99.)

There are many examples of scientific controversies where scientific uncertainty justifies a reasonable degree of disagreement. The evidence for, and impact of climate change on human health has been one such case over the past decade. However, the research base that demonstrates that the earth is warming at a rate unprecedented during post-hunter-gatherer human existence, and that this will have significant and serious impacts on human health, is now beyond dispute. If ever a review of the growing evidence put this beyond question it is this superbly researched and comprehensive review published by the World Health Organisation (WHO), in conjunction with the World Meteorological Organisation and the United Nations Environment Programme.

This edited volume provides, firstly, a clear overview of the climatic modelling underlying the debates, enabling the reader to understand the confidence limits in estimates of observed and projected changes in extreme weather and climate events, and how such scientific data should speak to policy makers. Secondly, this book summarises effectively the wealth of information on health impacts likely to arise from climate change. At least five chapters address health concerns, adopting different frameworks to understanding both direct (e.g. air pollution, heat waves, aeroallergens, etc.) and indirect (e.g. food production, vector- and water-borne disease) mechanisms whereby human health (particularly of specific vulnerable populations) is likely to be impacted. In doing so, the book highlights both the uniquely global scale of the problem, and the challenge of developing new approaches to, and epidemiological methods for mapping the evidence. In its conclusions, the book provides an agenda for national and international action (although it pointedly avoids any recommendations which address the political accountability of countries, such as the USA, who have refused to ratify the Kyoto protocol).

This volume, which updates a previous WHO review in 1996, will be invaluable to environmental health practitioners, public health researchers, policy makers, students and teachers in environmental sciences and health, environmental activists, and to those working in the fields of infectious disease,

nutrition and air pollution wanting to understand the future impact of climate change on their discipline. At less than R150, it is well worth the buy.

Leslie London

Who Cares? AIDS in Africa

By Susan S Hunter. Pp. v + 247. R160. Palgrave MacMillan. 2003. ISBN 1-4039-3615-3. (Available from SAMA-HMPG. Price R160, members R150.)

This book tells the story of AIDS in Africa. Susan Hunter places AIDS in the context of epidemic history and of African economic development. HIV is the first totally new epidemic since the 15th century, and Hunter describes the patterns and impact of, among others, smallpox, syphilis and the bubonic plague, that have devastated human society in a similar manner over the last few thousand years. The tale of Molly and Pauline, women from Uganda, struggling to cope with the impact of AIDS in their rural community, brings reality to the statistics throughout.

The author also places AIDS in the economic context of African history — from slavery, both within Africa and from abroad, through the rise and fall of colonialism; both of which have undermined community solidarity and left poorly sustainable economic structures. This has resulted in widespread poverty, overcrowding and malnutrition, conditions which worsen the impact of infectious diseases, including malaria and HIV.

There are one or two minor medical errors in the book — but it remains a fascinating read, and worthy of any library. I find the price prohibitive — in the region of a textbook rather than a novel. This book is a must-read for health care workers overwhelmed in the HIV/AIDS field. It will provide a different, more distant perspective of HIV in the context of global disease. Human kind has been assaulted by disease many times in the past and survived. It will do so again.

C Orrell

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