

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Betrayal of Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health*

Laurie Garrett

Hyperion Press, 2000

ISBN: 0-786-88440-1

768 pages, \$16.95 (paperback)

REVIEWED BY PETER BLUMENTHAL, MD, MPH

What does a Pulitzer Prize winning author<sup>1</sup> do for an encore? How does she go about raising further interest in global public health? The options range from writing a witty essay to, perhaps, a political manifesto, or in the extreme, an almanac. The opus here under review borders on the latter. In a very ambitious tome, with a preface by Steven M. Wolinsky, Garrett calls for restoration of a dismantled public health infrastructure both at home and abroad. She argues, convincingly, that such an effort will have to be a global one. She deserves kudos for a comprehensive effort. However, she offers more food for thought than this reviewer can digest.

Staying with the food metaphor, a gourmet meal needs sound basic ingredients. A meal is nutritious when it contains those staples vital for survival. The various ingredients need to complement each other. Ultimately, the success hinges on an appealing presentation, or nobody will want to eat it. Please bear with me as I indulge in some rumination. Let's start with the basic ingredients:

Winslow,<sup>2</sup> a giant in the field, defines public health as the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health and efficiency through organized community effort. Worthy goals include sanitation of the environment, control of communicable infections, education of the individual in personal hygiene, organization of medical and nursing services for early diagnosis and prevention of disease, and development of the so-

cial machinery to insure each person a standard of living adequate for the maintenance of health.

In this book, Garrett asserts: "Public health is a bond—a trust—between a government and its people. The society at large entrusts its government to oversee and protect the collective good health, and in return individuals agree to cooperate by providing tax monies, accepting vaccines, and abiding by the rules and guidelines laid-out by government public health leaders. If either side betrays that trust the system collapses like a house of cards." Garrett leaves little doubt that the American public health infrastructure has been undermined by what she calls "anti-governmentalism." Let's face it: We will have to pay taxes to achieve public health and safety.

Neglect of public health, the author says, would cause a resurgence of disease, resulting in disability and social dependency. It is the creed of all public health advocates that the social cost of dependency exceeds that of disease prevention.

There are social and medical solutions to public health problems. Using the example of tuberculosis, Garrett shows, convincingly, that social solutions to this infectious disease had already curbed the problem substantially before medical treatment with antibiotics became a reality in 1939. Likewise, for many, if not all, public health problems, the solutions are social, and not medical. Despite their effectiveness, however, social measures are unappealing, since they restrict personal freedom and tax personal income. Instead, medical measures seem much more desirable. Garrett uses the same example of tuberculosis to illustrate how medical measures, when haphazardly applied, can create a new epidemic—that of multi-drug-resistant disease. Thus, there are inherent dangers when relying solely on medical solutions.

One major tool to enhance public health is

The Book Review section of *New Jersey Medicine* is edited by ALAN J. LIPPMAN, MD, deputy editor.

access to affordable health care, an issue with which we do not seem ready to come to terms. Instead, we are facing health care disparity, both on the domestic scene and abroad. Garrett claims, repeatedly, that organized medicine has been more hindrance than help, in this regard. I accept her argument. However, a new focus on public health—exemplified by this very journal—raises hope that we are learning from our mistakes.

Public health today is a global challenge. An international group of public health experts has claimed: “The past decade has witnessed a profound transformation in the challenges to global health; persistent problems have been joined by new scourges in a world that is ever more complex and interdependent. The idea that the health of every nation depends on the health of all others is not an empty piety but an epidemiological fact.”<sup>3</sup>

Garrett touches upon all of these underlying principles. She may be assuming too much when she expects them to be recognized and cherished. Therefore, the book lacks clarity and effectiveness. It does contain eloquent and moving chapters on the plague epidemic in India in 1994 and the Ebola virus epidemic in Zaire in 1995. Alluding to recent developments in Russia, she illustrates how public health can collapse when the infrastructure is dismantled, as occurred in a country that sent the first astronaut into orbit. She warns against further reduction in public health spending here and now, emphasizing the need for an intact public health infrastructure to combat bioterrorism. In hard, unsentimental terms, the author concludes that investment in public health will increase our safety and safeguard our prosperity. By helping cure disease abroad, we will stop its importation. By fighting social injustice at home and abroad, we may even strike at the roots of bioterrorism. Garrett has created a longwinded, yet timely, plea that we address the wellness of the entire human species. *AJM*

REFERENCES

1. L. Garrett. *Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance*. (Viking Penguin: New York, 1995).

2. C. A. Winslow. “The Untilled Field of Public Health.” *Mod. Med* 2 (1920): 183.

3. Yagob, et al. “A Vital Opportunity for Public Health.” *Lancet* 350 (1997): 750-751.

PETER BLUMENTHAL, MD, MPH, obtained his public health degree from the New Jersey Graduate Program in Public Health at UMDNJ-Rutgers. He is a clinical assistant professor of medicine, UMDNJ-NJMS.

*Life Script: How the Human Genome Discoveries Will Transform Medicine and Enhance Your Health*

Nicholas Wade

Simon & Schuster, 2001

ISBN 0-743-22318-7

204 pages, \$12.00

REVIEWED BY ROBERT L. TRELSTAD, MD

Human adventures of historic moment provide a framework for a thousand stories for a thousand nights. From his perches at *Nature*, *Science*, and the *New York Times*, Nicholas Wade, an astute and knowledgeable follower of the biomedical sciences for the past three decades, gives us seven such stories, in a tour of the Human Genome Project.

The journey begins in the White House in which a contemporary president, Bill Clinton, in a fictional encounter with a predecessor, Thomas Jefferson, extols the virtues and values of collecting data and making “maps”; one of the route West to the Pacific, another of the route to an understanding of the biosphere.

The second story is a guide to the tactics, politics, and personalities of the participants in the effort known as the Human Genome Project. For those interested in the process of how “science” works, this chapter provides fly-on-the-wall details that only individuals like Wade, a science observer, can provide, and that are possibly the most accurate we can get, given that the first-hand participants will likely write their biographies with a “mote in their eye.”

In the third chapter, Wade attempts to provide a layman’s guide to the chemistry and biology of the genome. This is a daunting task, in the absence of any diagrams, because it is difficult to “see what