

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **Fevered Cities. A History of Dengue Epidemics**

***by Randall M Packard***

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Johns Hopkins University Press  
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Dengue is a viral disease, transmitted by *Aedes* mosquitoes. Symptoms range from subclinical to flu-like to a life-threatening hemorrhagic form and this spectrum can make diagnosis difficult. Its other name was 'break-bone' fever, aptly describing the discomfort in severe cases. It is spreading globally in warm areas. Fortunately, we see only imported cases in the UK, but it is already reported in clusters in Southern Europe as global warming advances. A thorough historical review is justified.

Packard, Emeritus Professor in the History of Medicine at Johns Hopkins has made a major contribution. The book is expertly researched and referenced and contains some well-chosen figures. It brings in so much more than dengue itself and relates it to historical and geographical societal norms and attitudes, poverty, climate, lack of health resources.

Packard chooses dengue outbreaks spread over time and geographically in cities, Philadelphia, Manila, Bangkok, Havana, Santiago de Cuba, Delhi and Singapore. Understanding and the responses related to the level of knowledge about dengue at the time are discussed, ranging from miasmatic to the latest knowledge. It's a complex analysis, involving medical, political, social, cultural attitudes and responses. Different dengue variants can complicate the epidemiological interpretation.

Vaccination is discussed but it's not a sole solution.

Dengue has spread relentlessly around the globe. The reasons for this may include increased human migration and global warming. Elimination of poverty, slums and mosquitoes in cities is paramount but extremely challenging. Novel dengue vaccines and mosquito control methods may provide some hope but not at the expense of poverty and slum reduction in cities.

It is argued that profound change in health systems in its widest definition is needed to effectively control and contain dengue in the future.

This book is readable and well written by an expert. It will interest many including infectious disease, public health specialists, social historians and indeed anyone interested in the history of a major viral disease in a global context. It will also be of use to students and others doing historical work on epidemics and how they were tackled. I enjoyed it very much and look forward to a new edition in a decade when the picture may have changed completely!

**William Dobb**  
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