



Book Reviews

Ensuring Value for Money in Healthcare – The role of health technology assessment in the European Union, Corinna Sorenson, Michael Drummond, Panos Kanavos. WHO on behalf of the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (2008), ISBN 978 92 890 7183 3

During a period of economic recession and impending public spending cuts policy makers are increasingly focusing on value for money. This short book is a timely reminder of the importance of health technology assessment (HTA). This report is the result of a year long project set up to consider the concepts and controversy surrounding HTA in Europe, and discusses the use of HTA guidance in priority-setting, decision-making and health-care provision.

The report is written in a style that makes easy reading and the content should appeal particularly to those new to this area of health science. The introduction of health technologies (drugs, devices and procedures) into practice is frequently based on local, political and financial considerations rather than an evidence-based review. Consequently uptake and outcomes can vary between areas and countries. The main text reviews the background, issues, challenges and problems presented by HTA, and makes comments and recommendations on how the process and implementation could be improved. This is a good summary of the progress of HTA development in Europe up to 2008 and will increase the knowledge and understanding for students of HTA.

The authors argue that without good evidence from an HTA, the uptake of a new technology is more likely to be based on local factors resulting in suboptimal health outcomes and inefficient use of health resources. They discuss the requirements of a robust HTA which should involve a wide range of stakeholders, including patients, and report that there are moves to include industry representatives. The science and quality of HTAs has improved and there is a growing consensus across Europe on the criteria for an 'optimum' HTA, with calls for increasing transparency in the process, and the need to consider areas for disinvestment and opportunity costs.

The appendices to the report contain case studies of HTA activity in six countries in the European Union, (Sweden, Netherlands, Finland, France, Germany and the United Kingdom). These outline the healthcare and reimbursement systems and discuss their progress with HTA.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) features large in this report. Since publication in 2008 however further changes have already taken place within NICE. The NICE remit has expanded considerably in 2009 with several of the recommendations mentioned in the report being introduced or announced, (increased patient

involvement, industry representation, a scheme to recognise innovation and fast track novel products, and technology appraisals for medical devices). This shows how fast the science and the processes surrounding HTA are evolving at present.

This report is comprehensive, balanced, and explains the challenges and opportunities for healthcare decision-makers to maximise the potential of HTA, in order to capture the benefits of technologies within the constraints of health resources. Notwithstanding my comments about how fast things are changing (NICE), this report is a good summary of HTA progress so far. It can be downloaded from the European Observatory website at http://www.euro.who.int/observatory/Publications/20080407_1

Philip Rutledge
Consultant in Medicines Management,
Public Health and Health Policy, NHS Lothian,
Edinburgh, Scotland, UK
E-mail address: philip.rutledge@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

Available online 19 January 2010

0033-3506/\$ – see front matter
doi:10.1016/j.puhe.2009.10.009

Beyond anthrax – The weaponization of infectious diseases, Larry Lutwic, Suzanne Lutwick (Eds.) Springer Publishing, New York, (2008), ISBN 978-1-58829-438-8

This book is intended to be a primer for clinicians and epidemiologists, a collection of contributions aimed at increasing knowledge of bioterrorism. An albeit highly specialised field, but one which from time to time touches mainstream specialties and ordinary practitioners in sometimes surprising ways. My own experience is a prime example when, in 2006, being obliged to undertake a public health response to a fatal case of anthrax in a rural Scottish health setting.

The editors have struck a good balance between readability and comprehensive coverage, editing a diverse range of different authorial styles while retaining the depth of fascinating knowledge including historical perspectives, transmission characteristics, therapeutic interventions and preventative measures. While the read is a little dry, the information is universally fascinating.

The book introduces the history of biological warfare before launching into a description of the 5 main category A diseases. An explanation of what the categories mean would have helped, namely that provided by CDC where bioterrorism agents can be separated into three categories, depending on how easily they

can be spread and the severity of illness or death they can cause. Category A agents are considered the highest risk to the public and national security because: they can be easily spread from person to person; they have potential for causing public health problems with major death and disease impacts; they might very easily cause public and professional panic with social disruption. To sort them out requires special public health preparedness. Category A agents include examples such as smallpox and tularemia, category B agents such as ricin or typhus are also important because of the ease with which they can be spread and Category C agents such as hantavirus are those that are considered emerging threats for disease.

The book has been in development for a number of years. There is a relative paucity of diagrammatic illustrations but the knowledge base is well established and is obviously targeted at primarily a US audience but that notwithstanding, the need to exchange this type of information worldwide is recognised. Some of the principles included and discussed are truly international including first class public health surveillance, the key resource of rapid identification of any pathogen and the vital impact and contribution of media,

The book has a collection of contributions from internationally recognised experts in the field of bioterrorism so is in itself unique. At a cost of £75.50, I was probably

expecting too much from this daunting and intriguingly titled volume. It is likely to be a resource for departments or individuals involved in potential or actual responses to such organisms.

It is a portable source of a huge amount of information which can only increase our collective awareness of an important range of diseases which thankfully, we may only encounter very rarely if at all. However, when encountered, clinicians and epidemiologists will be very grateful for a readily accessible source of detailed, disease specific, information such as this. We may all collectively wish to be more aware of this type of disease in the future in order to best avoid the old adage that experience is something you get, shortly after you need it. This book is a useful contribution to preparedness for bioterrorist events.

Andrew Riley

Senior Medical Officer, Room 2 N.07, St Andrew's House,
Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG, UK

E-mail address: Andrew.Riley@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Available online 19 January 2010

0033-3506/\$ – see front matter
doi:10.1016/j.puhe.2009.10.010

Beyond Anthrax

The Weaponization of Infectious Diseases

Lutwick, L.I.; Lutwick, S.M. (Eds.)

2009, XVI, 374 p. 6 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-58829-438-8

A product of Humana Press