

Out of Hours Books

THE END IS EXTREMELY NIGH

Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Human Pandemic

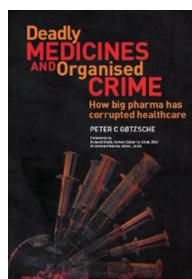
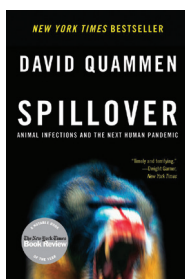
David Quammen

Vintage, 2013, PB, 592pp, £10.99,
978-0099522850

Deadly Medicines and Organised Crime: How Big Pharma Has Corrupted Healthcare

Peter C Gøtzsche

Radcliffe Publishing Ltd, 2013, PB, 328pp,
£24.99, 978-1846198847



The future for humanity looks decidedly bleak in these two books. Take your pick: a pandemic or two looming on the horizon and a pharmaceutical industry beyond redemption.

David Quammen is an accomplished storyteller and his book weaves a comprehensive tale of zoonoses and 'spillover': when those infections lurch across species into homo sapiens. Infections, such as the one due to the Hendra virus, may, at first, seem distant and exotic diseases far removed from the purview of general practice, but this view can be neatly reversed when considering just one zoonosis: Ebola. It has been flaring intermittently since its first recorded emergence in 1976 and Quammen travels to Central Africa to explore the origins of Ebola. The chapter on SARS is just as eye-opening and the author finishes by unpicking the HIV tale, detailing the wounded hunter hypothesis, and exposing the trade in bush meat en route. HIV is traced back to the early 20th century and turns out to be, terrifyingly, not just one spillover, but multiple spillovers.

At first glance the global and governmental mechanisms to manage pandemics can seem fuzzy and over-elaborate; some may feel they are plain self-serving. *Spillover* brings the risk from zoonoses into sharp focus. Perhaps the Ebola virus will be the one to sweep away a significant proportion of humanity. Probably not, but Quammen's

book is compelling and shows that there are many candidates out there vying to be the next pandemic.

One of the players to dig us out of our pandemic hole and perhaps save us from an early death will be the pharmaceutical industry. What hope? Not much if one looks at the Tamiflu® saga. And absolutely no hope if Peter C Gøtzsche's book is anything to go by. When it comes to passion, nothing can trump a dose of Gøtzsche's rage. He lays it out in thick dramatic strokes. The detail in this book is almost overwhelming and the case against pharma exhaustive. Gøtzsche makes no bones about it: the deceit, the anti-trust cases, the outright criminal, and the immoral.

The overall tone is nothing short of apoplectic. It's almost too much. This book needed to be written but most people, understandably, won't stray beyond Goldacre's *Bad Pharma* for the concise version. The inescapable conclusion is that the pharmaceutical industry is appallingly misaligned with individual and global health needs. In Gøtzsche's words: '*Our drugs kill us on a horrific scale. This is unequivocal proof that we have created a system that is out of control.*'

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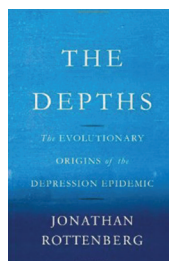
DOI: 10.3399/bjgp14X682981

ARE THERE ANY ADVANTAGES TO DEPRESSION?

The Depths: The Evolutionary Origins of the Depression Epidemic

Jonathan Rottenberg

Basic Books, 2014, HB, 272 pp, £17.99,
978-0465022212



I was interested to read this book because it promised a different take on the much-quoted and rather gloomy statistics on

the relentless rise in the prevalence of depression worldwide, and indicated it would provide a less reductionist view by suggesting that there might be evolutionary benefits to depression as part of the human condition. This was touched on; the premise being that low mood and withdrawal from testing or potentially dangerous situations may confer a protective benefit, as well as the argument that depressed individuals may have a better awareness of the reality of various situations, but these weren't really explored as much as they could have been.

There were then chapters on depression in various animal species, the impact of bereavement, potential triggers for depression, and factors influencing the potential for recovery, but overall, I found this a rather difficult book to read. There were some interesting observations; for example, experiments suggesting that people with depression may show less emotional reactivity to both positive and negative stimuli and that those with the least reactivity when discussing sad events have the poorest prognosis. However, it was all presented in a rather jumbled and haphazard fashion, with patient stories and references to the author's own past history of significant depression interspersed with references to scientific research in a way which I found quite confusing.

I think the most useful aspect of the book was how it emphasised the heterogeneity of the disorder in terms of presentation, duration, and response to treatment, but I wasn't really sure who the target audience for this book should be. It seemed to oscillate between clinical descriptions, aspects of being a self-help guide, and detailed descriptions of academic research, but lacked a clear focus. The author is clearly very engaged with the topic, both from his personal and professional experience. I think the underlying idea of linking his own and other personal experiences of depression with more factual descriptions of current theories and research in the area was a good one, but unfortunately it didn't quite work for me here.

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