



Antimicrobial Drugs: Chronicle of a twentieth century medical triumph

David Greenwood

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Between 1935 and 1944 the field of microbiology, and by implication medicine as a whole, underwent dramatic advancement. The discovery of the extraordinary antibacterial properties of sulphonamides, penicillin, and streptomycin triggered a frantic hunt for more antimicrobial drugs that was to yield an abundant harvest in a very short space of time. By the early 1960s more than 50 antibacterial agents were available to the prescribing physician and, largely by a process of chemical modification of existing compounds, that number has more than tripled today. We have become so used to the ready availability of these relatively safe and highly effective 'miracle drugs' that it is now hard to grasp how they transformed the treatment of infection.

This book documents the progress made from the first tentative search for an elusive 'chemotherapy' of infection in the early days of the twentieth century, to the development of effective antiviral agents for the management of HIV as the millennium drew to a close. It also offers a celebration of the individuals and groups that made this miracle happen, as well as examining the inexorable rise of the global pharmaceutical industry, and, most intriguingly, the essential input of luck.

Infection still maintains a high profile in both medicine and the media, with the current threats of 'superbugs' such as MRSA acquired in hospital, and a potential resistance to antibiotics. This book tracks the history of antimicrobial drugs, a remarkable medical triumph that has provided doctors with an amazing armoury of safe and effective drugs that ensure that reversion to the helpless state of the fight against infection witnessed in the early 1900s is extremely unlikely. This timely compendium acknowledges the agents that have surely led to the relief of more human and animal suffering than any other class of drugs in the history of medical endeavour.

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