Book
Sexually transmitted infections and sexually transmitted diseases

This hefty, 925 page book summarises the most up-to-date information on sexually transmitted infections and diseases. The rationale for the seemingly ambiguous title is provided by the inclusion of diseases that are not transmitted sexually, but can be the result of an infection that is (eg, AIDS and HIV) and of ectoparasites that can be transmitted through sexual contact.

The editors have done an impressive job in bringing together world experts in the laboratory and clinical sciences related to these diverse subjects. Over the course of 63 chapters, renowned authors from various continents and disciplines communicate their topics of expertise and most do so engagingly. Many sections overlap, but this repetition aids completeness. Indeed, most chapters read as self-contained contributions with their own core messages. More stringent editing might have been worthwhile, since chapters vary widely in length, depth, organisation, and style (including variable referencing of published work). Also, a more extensive index would have been helpful.

The chapters are organised into 13 sections. The first three sections—starting with the basic elements (including an interesting historical account of venereal diseases) and proceeding with bacterial infections (ranging from gonorrhoea to donovonosis) and viral infections (with ample consideration for diseases associated with HIV and human papillomavirus)—account for two-thirds of the volume. The book loses some of its appeal in the remaining sections, which contain mostly one or two chapters each. The section devoted to prevention and vaccines is an exception, but its six chapters barely begin to describe the available knowledge about prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

The list of topics included is impressive, and questionable choices are few. The reader might wonder, though, why the editors have chosen to include epidemiological descriptions of HIV by geographic region in distinct chapters, whereas hepatitis B virus is included with all other hepatitis viruses in one chapter.

The strength of this lavishly illustrated book is its consistent emphasis on diagnosis and treatment, with a clear discussion of the natural history of infection and disease at its core. Most rewarding is the successful synthesis of laboratory and clinical science. Topics of ongoing research and recent technological developments are well covered, with comprehensive citations up to 2010.

In view of its intended audience, “the medical student and resident who are interested in infectious diseases, the clinician who diagnoses and treats STDs and the microbiologist who will advance new developments in the field”, the authors have certainly succeeded in providing a text that is up to its publisher’s standard. It might not be particularly suited for those who wish to learn about the biology of sexually transmitted parasites or how to control epidemics, because the approach is mostly centred on the patient and the clinic. Still, research scientists, epidemiologists, and public health workers, might find it an authoritative and valuable work of reference, and a source of continuing inspiration.

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Film
Asmaa

Filmmaker Amr Salama is not optimistic about Egypt’s prospects. He fears that the post-Mubarak era will be come to be defined by religiosity and even stricter censorship. Not that he was pro-Mubarak. Salama was part of last year’s protests; one time the soldiers dragged him into an empty building and beat him until their ringleader was too tired to wield his cudgel. Salama wrote about that incident and recalled the bitter remark of one his friends: “Egypt’s only future is immigration to Canada”.

So it comes as a small surprise that Asmaa, which Salama wrote and directed, is an essentially hopeful film. An onscreen inscription occupying the first frame reminds us that the story is inspired by true events, although there are crucial divergences between the real-life narrative and that of the film. The eponymous heroine, played superbly by the expressive Hend Sabry, has been transplanted from her rural roots to a stuffy apartment in Cairo. The noise from the local marketplace seeps in through the windows. She lives with her grizzled father and spoilt daughter. After she has prepared breakfast for her daughter—“it’s too salty, I’m not eating this”—Asmaa begins her commute to the airport, where she works as a cleaner.

The film opens with Asmaa about to undergo a lifesaving gall bladder operation. She prays feverishly before whispering to the readying surgeons that she is HIV-positive. They refuse to do the procedure. It sets into