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Deeply researched revelation of escalating danger of drug-resistant bacteria, MRSA.

Superbug: The Fatal Menace of MRSA Details

Date : Published March 23rd 2010 by Free Press (first published 2010)

ISBN : 9781416557272

Author : Maryn McKenna

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : Science, Nonfiction, Health, Medicine, Medical

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From Reader Review Superbug: The Fatal Menace of MRSA for online ebook

SHARON LUCILLE ALEXANDER says

Intriguing and informative

Working as an RN during these years, I remained unaware of the darker side of MRSA, never knowing how its metamorphosis terrorized the medical profession and decimated lives. I fear we haven't heard the last of this.

Melanie says

Maryn McKenna is a doctor that writes like a novelist. Her book gave the shakes and caused me to break out in a cold sweat. I read it in one sitting. Over the past 18 months or so, I've read just about everything I could find about MRSA including journal articles and clinical trial descriptions, but I could have saved myself the time and effort (not to mention the hours spent with a medical dictionary) by just reading this book. Everything you ever wanted to know about MRSA (and VISA and VRSA) - and a lot you will wish you never knew - all laid out in easy-to-follow layman's terms.

Highly recommend.

Frank says

Often, the books that frighten me the most aren't horror novels. Instead, I'm more likely to be disturbed after reading texts detailing real-life threats, especially dangers that are under reported and not taken seriously.

So it's probably no surprise that Superbug: The Fatal Menace of MRSA scared the hell out of me. As the text's title indicates, Superbug is all about MRSA, a bacterium responsible for a range of difficult-to-treat infections. MRSA stands for Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus but is commonly labeled as staph, or, more appropriately, drug-resistant staph. It is especially dangerous because it has developed resistance to many antibiotic drugs that are normally used to counter bacterial infections. In this sense, MRSA has become more drug-resistant in part because of our societal overuse of antibiotics.

There are a variety of strains and manifestations of MRSA, from minor skin infections to severe necrotizing or flesh bacteria syndrome. The fear with MRSA, as author Maryn McKenna conveys, is that we may be approaching a MRSA strain, or superbug, that's untreatable.

The book doesn't offer much consolation or conclude with a silver bullet that's on its way to defeat MRSA, although the author does touch on some of the current research exploring MRSA vaccines and mentions some of the tactics used in preventive MRSA screening.

As a reading experience, Superbug was accessible and well-paced. The author smartly alternated between true stories of people with MRSA to more technical passages that delved into the history and science behind

the bug. There were some spots that were a little too esoteric for me, but, overall, Maryn McKenna is a fluid and accomplished writer and I learned a lot.

In a media-saturated age that can't wait to report about the next pandemic, sometimes it's hard to know which looming diseases to take seriously. When I mentioned I was reading Superbug to a friend, he questioned the threat of MRSA and contended that, if it was so serious, I should probably know some people who had MRSA. I considered the claim but disputed the logic. I personally don't know anyone with HIV or Juvenile Diabetes, but that doesn't mean those conditions aren't serious. Ultimately, I think the facts and cases Maryn McKenna presents in Superbug speak for themselves, and we need to take MRSA seriously.

Nicole says

"Superbug" is written by science journalist Maryn McKenna. This book explores the stories of real-life patients of MRSA (an antibiotic-resistant bacterium) as well as explaining everything about the bacteria. Essentially, this book is MRSA 101, describing everything from terminology healthcare professionals use to, how different strains are cataloged, to even the structure and functioning of the bacterium. I didn't enjoy how everything was explained. It is almost as if the author expects the reader to read the book already having an understanding of MRSA, since she quickly covers the basics, but spends the majority of the book explaining complex ideas such as comparing different strains of MRSA on a molecular level. What did redeem this book for me was McKenna's coverage of patients with MRSA. It was eyeopening to read about people of all ages who all contracted MRSA differently. It just emphasizes how big of an issue superbugs are. I would recommend this book. It is a hard read, and you may have to reread some sections of this book, but it is worthwhile to read about the health threat that is antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Emily K says

I don't usually enjoy non-fiction books, but this one was able to keep my attention. Although it made me even more paranoid than before I still liked how every chapter was started off with an anecdote.

Julie says

Terrifying

Well-written, yet terrifying play by play account of how MRSA has infiltrated our hospitals and communities...this book is a fast read, but leaves many questions unanswered. The true terror is that is due to the fact that, as of now, there are no answers.

Atar says

MRSA and this book seriously scares me. And it should you. I have had this bacteria before and it was extremely painful. As luck would have it mine was only a skin infection. Lanced and treated with basic antibiotics it went away without too many complications. However there are many different ways MRSA can

debilitate and or destroy ones family and life. If you want to protect your kids, parents, siblings and yourself I fiercely suggest reading this book. Before I started reading it I thought that it was probably going to be a long and boring read filled with too many unrelatable facts, studies, and medical jargon. All of which are included but what really made it a great read are the personable stories of the effects MRSA had on people and their families. Some of them are very disturbing but you won't want to put the book down. This book is fantastic and I recommend it to all.

Stephen says

When she said "Why read books about microbes that can kill you?", I answered "This is the stuff of which drama is made: medical hero versus advancing death with too few weapons and too little logistical support."

I do rather wish that the hucksters who name books and design book covers would be a bit more reserved than screaming "Superbug: The Fatal Menace of MRSA." The only thing missing from this bright-red dust-cover is a man in a rubber monster suit (like "The Creature from the Black Lagoon") carrying a voluptuous nurse, who has fainted in fear, and whose uniform is slipping dangerously. Every sleeper needs a villain to fill up a nightmare: the Viet Cong, the walking dead, militant vegans. Who knew that a tiny bacterium called Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* would more than suffice? It is difficult to write about a bacterium which changes in response to challenges in its environment without personifying that organism; it is difficult not to use words which impute malice to microbes when their "behaviour" seems to arise from evil intent.

Without becoming shrill, McKenna casts a disturbing light on (a) the shift from primarily hospital acquired MRSA to community acquired MRSA, (b) the lack of a national strategy to address the problem, (c) the insufficiency of public health agencies, crippled by budget cuts, to meet the challenge, and (d) the lack of economic motive to find new antibiotics to counter these bugs. Her academic credentials are excellent as is her use of the scientific literature to make her points. It is no wonder that she has won so many medical-professional awards for her writing. A second edition to add coverage of the six years since publication of the first would be welcome.

When she said, "Doesn't it make you feel creepy to read stuff like that?", I answered "Frequent handwashing has been shown to be the best line of defense against MRSA. Isn't that interesting?"

Layne Lebahn says

This book was very creepy at times, very sad at others. McKenna does a great job putting a human face on the disease, while also explaining the science in a way that a lay person could understand.

I was a little numbed/bored at the end of the book - each new case or description of the ravages of the disease just began to seem repetitive after a while. But, overall, a great and captivating read.

Jon says

This book is interesting but it reads like a newspaper article, full of lots seemingly informative statistics, like "something increased 16 times" without saying what the underlying numbers were. So I would say it's a little light on raw data, though it is extensively footnoted if you wanted to find the raw data.

It makes an emotional argument for why you should be scared of MRSA but it doesn't go for the kill by presenting hard numbers. I think, as the book alludes to, that this because it's not tracked nationally - or if it is now it has not been tracked well in the past.

The bottom line: you really don't want MRSA to enter your life of that of any loved one. It's a frightening bacteria, but keep in mind that prior to antibiotics, staph infections were probably just as frightening. We're scared of this because most of us have grown up with a savior - antibiotics. In the late 1800's and early 1900's this wasn't the case. The book doesn't have any mortality rates for MRSA or historically, so it's hard to know if this version of staph is that much more virulent than a regular staph infection gone wrong without antibiotics.

I liked the book, but it's not one I would read again.

However, the personal stories of those infected with the bacteria are in many cases heart breaking. MRSA is a very serious issue for those infected and this book does call that out clearly.

Ed Yoo says

Good journalistic approach.

The author writes this like a reporter, but the robust clinical understanding underpinned with good research and evidence makes this a scary but compelling read.

Petra X says

I read quite a lot of this book before getting bogged down in gene variants of MRSA and thinking that a microbiologist might enjoy this but MRSA's a bit like bullets, doesn't matter the variation, they can all kill you. I did learn something interesting though - that it is an urban myth that MRSA is hospital-acquired. It's in the community, it's everywhere and it will generally either make you very sick, even sicker or you die.

Thinking back to Atul Gawande's wonderful *Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance* I am reminded that the majority of germs in a hospital are not passed by nurses, visitors, sitting on toilets, touching the taps or anything like that. Nurses and visitors use the Purel and cleaners clean. Mostly. What they do not clean much is bedrails and doctors who touch you a lot don't tend to use Purel. Moral: keep wipes next to the bed and do the bedrails when the doctor's been if you didn't manage to get him to sanitise his hands.

I have a step-niece. Her mother, my sister-in-law almost certainly has Munchausen's by Proxy. The niece was a fat cow. She was fat because she ate too much. I came in with her mother and my brother one day after visiting my mother in the hospice and there were three Wiener schnitzels and a huge amount of fries and a

giant family-sized Cadbury's chocolate bar. We thought she had cooked for us. No, it was her supper. All of it. She was going to send out for pizza for us (and her).

Anyway her mother persuaded her to eat even more so that on her 18th birthday she would be grossly obese and qualify for the weight loss surgery her somewhat bulimic/anorexic mother thought she should have. She persuaded the doctor who was young, handsome and I have to say, stupid (my mother convinced him that she was dying so she could go to a hospice - she didn't die for another 6 months and was thrown out of the hospice for bad behaviour) that her daughter had PCOS and that's why she was fat with bad periods and hairy and also something wrong with her joints that made them floppy so she couldn't exercise.

So she got a gastric bypass and she got MRSA. She was very, very ill for a very long time. Her mother stopped inventing diseases for her children and husband now. Or at least physical ones. There is still the son with Crohn's and Tourette's (really) and all manner of co-morbid things she can think up to get attention but nothing more anyone gets hospitalised for.

So MRSA cures and as well as kills. (Sick joke).

Flora says

Pass the Purell, please. The article is written clearly and presents its facts very well, particularly regarding the evolution and research. I just got tired of reading how none of the patients had heard of MRSA when it's been out there for years. Granted, coverage has stepped up considerably since 2003, but it's a sad indicator of public ignorance on a significant health concern.

George Smith says

As a retired Clinical and Public Health Microbiologist, I can say that this writer knows the subject. So I can recommend this book. But the reader should be warned, this book is quite technical and very detailed, and really very disturbing. In this busy world, I think some important facts about MRSA and other "superbugs" can get lost in the detail. What facts? Well MRSA is not just a problem of sick people getting infected in hospitals, which was the case 15 years ago when I left the hospital lab. Today MRSA can be acquired by healthy people in the outside community. So MRSA is a problem of the whole community, not just the sick community. It has grown into a Public Health problem, and Public Health departments are being cut right and left. Another fact: Pharmaceutical companies are not looking for newer antimicrobials to use against MRSA or other superbugs that will pop up. Why not? No profit: Antimicrobials need to be used sparingly, and newer ones need to be kept in reserve, so there is no profit for developing new and better bullets to use against these threats. This author does a good job describing this situation and I think she is one of our finest journalists in the field of infectious disease. But I am less hopeful about the future of healthcare in my country after reading the book than I was before reading it. Despite so-called "reforms" the fact of life is that miracle-cures don't remain effective for long. This book shows how resistance to penicillin occurred soon after that miracle drug was developed, and methicillin-resistance followed soon later. Now we have vancomycin-resistance, etc. On and on. So don't depend on miracles for your healthcare. Act preventively. Handwashing helps. Staying out of crowds helps even more. Staying out of the hospital is really the biggest thing you can do to keep your health as long as possible, but sooner or later most of us will get sick and end up in the hospital. That is a fact of life. Hospital stays will increase. So will superbug infections. I Highly

recommend this disturbing book!

Donna says

MRSA = bad. Washing with Soap = good.
