

# Are we ready? Public health since 9/11

David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz

1st edn, xvi + 193 pp, with illustrations, paperback, RRP-USD18.95, ISBN13: 978-0-520-25038-3, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006.

Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in 2001 and the possibility of bioterrorism following the anthrax episode a month later, the engagement of public health in the global counteroffensive against terrorism was probably for the first time in many decades central to the response in the threats facing the United States of America (US). While there have been many books published about 9/11 and terrorism, few have focused on the public health response to these crises and how public health has evolved since then. The first edition of *Are we ready? Public health since 9/11* responds to this need and is based on oral histories and documentation of public health workers. The book contains a Foreword by Daniel M Fox and Samuel L Milbank, Preface, Acknowledgments, a table of Contents, an Introduction, 3 Chapters, a Conclusion, Notes and a comprehensive Index.

*Are we ready? Public health since 9/11* is presented as a 15 x 23 x 1.2 cm paperback publication, which could easily fit in the briefcase or carry bag and is an ideal read for airline lounges as well as in-flight. The full colour front cover depicts a man walking through the rubble after the collapse of the first World Trade Center tower on 11 September 2001. The back cover gives brief details of the book and of the authors. The stated primary target audience is probably all policy makers and implementers, as well as public health personnel. However, the book will appeal to all those involved in responding to terrorism and bioterrorism, including military policy makers and health professionals, as well as students and academic staff involved with counterterrorism and bioterrorism response programs.

The structure of *Are we ready? Public health since 9/11* is fairly straight forward. There is an "Introduction: Remembering the Moment"; three chapters including "September 11 and the Shifting Priorities of Public and Population Health in New York City"; "Emergency Preparedness, Bioterrorism and the States" and "Emergency Preparedness, Bioterrorism, and the CDC: Federal Involvement before and after 9/11"; and a "Conclusion: What Lessons Have We Learned". The book provides insight into the events surrounding 11 September 2001 and the subsequent anthrax attacks and presents a greater understanding of the events,

the complexities, the challenges, and the responses beyond what has been presented in the media and by the small number of public health publications on the events. It discusses the State and Federal agencies involved in the response from the local health department through to the world-famous US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It describes a number of issues that still need to be addressed including the need to strengthen communication, mental health services, interagency cooperation and a various other systems to help deal with known and unknown threats.<sup>2</sup> One of the limitations that is implied by its US centric focus is that it is not international in scope; however the events of 11 September 2001 and afterwards have driven major reforms in public health internationally, particularly with improved surveillance and monitoring programs and public health infrastructure, as well as funding for improved laboratory, research and other strategic networks. The other limitation, pointed out by another recent review,<sup>2</sup> given its focus, is that it does not cover Hurricane Katrina; however the authors admit that the manuscript was complete before this natural disaster unfolded, which was a further transformative event for public health.

The authors are two well known Professors. David Rosner is Professor of Public Health and History at Columbia University and Co-Director of the Centre for the History and Ethics of Public Health at Columbia's prestigious Mailman School of Public Health. Gerald Markowitz is Distinguished Professor of History at John Jay College and the Graduate Centre of the City University of New York. They are also co-authors of *Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution*, also from the same publisher as *Are we ready? Public health since 9/11*.

The production of the *Are we ready? Public health since 9/11* is an outstanding effort, even though it does not provide a simple answer to the question "Are we ready?", as suggested by another review.<sup>2</sup> The book has limited competition in the field of public health, although one may occasionally reach for a much larger and much more expensive reference textbook on public health and disasters, such as about to be released *Disasters and Public Health: Planning and Response*,<sup>3</sup>

to gain deeper insight into a particular condition. The book is a must read for those interested in the public health response to terrorism and bioterrorism and it is relatively inexpensive, especially now that it has started to appear in discount bins.

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*Reviewed by: Peter A. Leggat, MD, PhD, DrPH, FAFPHM, FACTM, FACRRM, FFTM ACTM, FFTM RCPSG, Professor and Head, School of Public Health, Tropical Medicine and Rehabilitation Sciences, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, 4811, Australia. Email: peter.leggat@jcu.edu.au*

### References

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