

## Book Review

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*HIV/AIDS in South Africa*. By Salim Karim and Quarraisha Karim. Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. 700; £35.00 (pb). ISBN: 0521616298.

This book covers many aspects of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. The epidemic is particularly severe in the country, with prevalence of about 25% among adults. A wealth of experience has accumulated through research and service delivery, and this book brings this together in one text.

The book is divided into seven sections as follows: (i) the evolving epidemic, (ii) the virus, the human host and their interactions, (iii) HIV risk factors and prevention strategies, (iv) focal groups for understanding the HIV epidemic, (v) the impact of AIDS on individual lives, health services and the community, the economy, ethics and demography, (vi) treating HIV, prevention of opportunistic infections, implementing antiretroviral programmes and the political history of AIDS treatment in South Africa, (vii) what the future holds.

The book is written largely by South African researchers and focused almost entirely on South Africa. It is an easy read, targeted at a general audience. It will be of interest to health-care providers, policy makers, and donor agencies, politicians and journalists. It will also be of interest to postgraduate students and researchers who have a narrow focus in HIV research or who do not work in HIV but want an accessible text that can quickly and painlessly inform them on issues relating to HIV/AIDS in South Africa. It may not have sufficient depth for a text book for HIV

researchers – for example, it does not provide a comprehensive bibliography. Instead selected references are listed at the end of each chapter. The book also focuses on the past and present, and less on where the gaps in knowledge are and where research should be targeted.

Most sections are well written. For example, the chapter on mother-to-child transmission of HIV-1, and several of the clinical chapters, are clear, concise, have breadth, and are informative. They are difficult to put down once you begin reading them. They will be of interest to people globally as well as in South Africa. In other parts of the book, some current issues appear to have been over-simplified. For example, the sections on HIV prevalence and incidence and sexual risk behaviour over-interpret published work in places, failing to take sufficient account of the shortcomings of the research studies (for example sources of bias arising from small sample sizes, studying selected populations, and measurement of subjective and sensitive outcomes). The ethics section gives an overview of issues relating to trials of mother-to-child HIV prevention through antiretrovirals, as discussed previously in the literature in the mid-1990s. It lacks a focus on current ethical issues in HIV, particularly in relation to provision of antiretroviral therapy (e.g. equity of access to therapy or provision of therapy after the ending of trials).

On the whole, this book is interesting and informative. It is welcomed, and one which will be of interest to many in South Africa and beyond.

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