

Book Review

Allergy and Immunity to Helminths. Common Mechanisms or Divergent Pathways?

REDWAN MOQBEL. Pp. 271. London: Taylor & Francis; 1992. £49.00.

Reactions to worms and allergens share a number of characteristics. In both there are increases in mast cells, IgE and mediators. It has been thought that the allergic reaction is an atavistic response, once useful in protection against parasites but in some way 'gone wrong' in the modern era. There are substantial differences in the antigen load. With pollens it is minute, 1 μ g a year, whereas with worms it is huge. The atopic is an example of high responder to very low-dose exposure, whereas everyone will make IgE to worms.

This excellent book explores the similarities and differences between the two responses. Lynch explores the relationship between worm infection and allergy and the role of socio-economic factors. Pritchard discusses genetic variables in this relationship.

Regulation of IgE and its protective role in schistosomiasis is discussed by Zanders *et al.* and Hagan *et al.* respectively. The eosinophil and T-cell regulation of immediate hypersensitivity are given individual chapters.

Miller has an excellent chapter on mast cells, and finally Macdonald *et al.* review the role of mediators in allergy and helminth infections.

This book brings together the truly divergent aspects of allergy and helminth infections, and is to be recommended as good value both intellectually and from the point of view of cost. It has not answered my perennial question: why is the prevalence of atopic disease increasing?

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