

History of Allergy

Volume edited by: K.C. Bergmann and J. Ring; Published by: S Karger AG, P.O. Box, CH-4009 Basel (Switzerland); 2014; Hard Cover; Pages: XX + 425 (single volume); Price: USD135.00; ISBN: 978-3-318-02194-3; e-ISBN: 978-3-318-02195-0.

The History of Allergy is an important topic published in the centennial volume of "Chemical Immunology and Allergy" published by Karger. The editors have befittingly earmarked a full volume to the historical perspectives of allergy. Allergic diseases, although have been known to exist since time immemorial with references found at least as far back as 2000 years, the disease has gained epidemic proportions over the recent decades only. The editors have been successful in bringing together some of the best known brains in allergic disease to provide insights into the various historical aspects of allergy.

The book has been divided into eight chapters.

The first chapter takes the reader way back in antiquity by at least 2000 years into the Mesopotamia, Egypt, China and indigenous American civilisations and discusses about their beliefs about allergy. Then it traces the history of allergy through the middle ages and renaissance. The chapter further discusses about the landmarks in allergy in the Nineteenth Century, notably the description of hay fever, pollens in seasonal rhinitis, anaphylaxis and asthma. The various milestones achieved in the Twentieth Century have been traced in detail including the formation of first organisation for allergy sufferers "Patients First", atopy, anaphylactic shock, scratch and various other tests in diagnosing allergy and development of immunotherapy. The first chapter concludes with description of the origin of various terminologies in allergic diseases.

Chapter 2 discusses the historical perspectives of individual allergic diseases, starting with detailed historical description of anaphylaxis followed by discussion on allergic rhinitis, asthma, atopic dermatitis, atopic eczema, allergic contact dermatitis, urticaria and angioedema, allergy in eye, food allergy. The chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of the historical aspects of relatively newer disorder of drug hypersensitivity including aspirin hypersensitivity.

Chapter 3 focuses on the discoveries into the mechanisms of allergy. It discusses about the discovery and role of immunoglobulin E, T-cell populations, mast cells, basophils, eosinophils, bradykinins, histamines and other mediators in allergic disorders.

Chapter 4 highlights the role of environmental influences and allergens in allergic diseases. It starts with description of pollen allergy at the start of Nineteenth Century followed by the role of mites, mammalian airborne allergens, food and environmental pollution in causing allergic disorders.

Chapter 5 is based on the discoveries of various therapies in the management of allergic disorders. The first part of the chapter details the research on catecholamines including adrenaline, noradrenaline and dopamine. This is followed by discussion on discovery of antihistaminics, glucocorticoids, chromes. The final two sub-divisions of this chapter discusses the characterisation and standardisation of allergen extracts and development of allergen specific immunotherapy over the years.

Chapter 6 is a collection of 13 interviews with some of the pioneers in the field of allergy including K. Frank Austen, John Bienenstock, Kurt Blaser, Alain de Weck (1928–2013), Alfred William Frankland, Oscar L. Frick, Kimishige Ishizaka, Lothar Jager, Terumasa Miyamoto, Harry Morrow Brown (1917–2013), Albert K. Oehling, Heimo Reulecke and Vaclav Spicak. The two eminent allergologist Alain de Weck and Harry Morrow Brown died before the publication of this book.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to the discussion on formation and evolution of some of the well known allergy societies around the world including AAAAI (American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology), APAAACI (Asia Pacific Association of Allergy, Asthma and Clinical Immunology), EAACI (European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology) and WAO (World Allergy Organization) etc.

Chapter 8 of the book is in the form of online supplemental material providing online access to two movies. The first movie on anaphylaxis *Anaphylaxie et Allergie* of 46 minutes was recorded way back in 1956. The movie shows anaphylactic shock in a dog and then discusses principles of allergic reactions, diagnosis and therapy. The second movie "World Allergy: The Disease of Civilization" is on the essential aspects of the history of allergy.

Overall, the book consists of 257 figures, 127 in colour and 20 tables. The printing quality is good and gives a pleasant reading. This book is a must have in the armamentarium of anyone interested in allergy and its evolution through the ages. It will be a useful reference book for medical college libraries.

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