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The Forgotten Cure: The Past And Future Of Phage Therapy



Synopsis

Before the arrival of penicillin in the 1940s, phage therapy was one of the few weapons doctors had against bacterial infections. It saved the life of Hollywood legend Tom Mix before being abandoned by Western science. Now, researchers and physicians are rediscovering the treatment, which pits phage viruses against their natural bacterial hosts, as a potential weapon against antibiotic-resistant infections. *The Forgotten Cure* traces the story of phages from Paris, where they were discovered in 1917; to Tbilisi, Georgia, where one of phage therapy's earliest proponents died at the hands of Stalin; to the Nobel podium, where prominent scientists have been recognized for breakthroughs stemming from phage research. Today, a crop of biotech startups and dedicated physicians is racing to win regulatory approval for phage therapy before superbugs exhaust the last drug in the medical arsenal. Will they clear the hurdles in time?

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Customer Reviews

"Bacteriophages have the potential to stop many if not most life threatening, drug resistant bacterial infections. *The Forgotten Cure* is a non-stop, cover to cover read." James D. Watson, Nobel Laureate
"A lively tale of killer viruses, superbugs and a magical cure that has all the twists of a cold-war spy novel." George Hackett, *Newsweek* magazine
"A marvelous, jargon-free historical account of the genesis, the ups-and-downs, and the current renaissance of phage therapy. *The Forgotten Cure* ranks at the

level of Judson's Eighth Day of Creation. Sankar Adhya National Institutes of Health
The Forgotten Cure: How a Long Lost Treatment Can Save Lives in the 21st Century
Before the arrival of penicillin in the 1940s, phage therapy was one of the few weapons doctors had against bacterial infections. It saved the life of Hollywood legend Tom Mix before being abandoned by Western science. Now, researchers and physicians are rediscovering the treatment, which pits phage viruses against their natural bacterial hosts, as a potential weapon against antibiotic-resistant infections. The Forgotten Cure traces the story of phages from Paris, where they were discovered in 1917; to Tbilisi, Georgia, where one of phage therapy's earliest proponents died at the hands of Stalin; to the Nobel podium, where prominent scientists have been recognized for breakthroughs stemming from phage research. Today, a crop of biotech startups and dedicated physicians is racing to win regulatory approval for phage therapy before superbugs exhaust the last drug in the medical arsenal. Will they clear the hurdles in time?

These wise words was written by George Santayana, back in the year 1905, and are very parallel to the story we read in this book, that is concerning the rediscovering of the Phage Therapy. To me the book was extremely interesting to read, but to most people it would help much if there inside the book, or on the front side, were 1 or 2 pictures of Phages, because the Phages are so strange looking, being extremely different to what we are used in seeing. Actual the Phages mostly are looking like some of the robots we have seen in films, in cartoons, or on the front covers to the novel by H. G. Wells: "War of the Worlds". But as the Phages are around 40 times smaller than the bacteria's which they attacks (or rarely, working together with), then a picture number 2 showing a Phage positioned, and working, on a bacteria, which it has attacked, would help furthermore. Of course we nowadays, by going to the Internet, can find pictures showing the Phages, but not everybody is using PCs. And furthermore, without doubt, more persons would be interested in reading this book, and thereby learning more about these strange Phages, when by browsing around in the book, seeing drawings of the Phages. The book is good in telling the historical background, concerning the discovery of the Phage, by d'Herelle. And as we again and again are going to the institute in Georgian, where Eliava, with connecting to d'Herelle, started the work on the Phage Therapy, we then read about the actual Russian history then passing by, after the Russian revolution in 1917. And learn that Eliava was executed by Stalin or Beria. But even though I'm from Denmark, and thereby not from Russia, I must point out that we are missing 2 important points that without doubt have connections to Stalins horrifying killing of many people. In the book, as in nearly all of the historical books, we are not told that actual, after The Revolution in 1917, when the First

World War was over, Russia in 1918 was invaded, from all sides, by USA, England, France, and Germany, and the war lasted until 1923. And furthermore before The Revolution, under the Tsar, a brother to Stalin had been executed. So without doubt these cases were some of the reason to the cruelty of Stalin. But in any case Lenin had warned against Stalin, that was, not to let him be the following leader. In the book there are many interesting cases, both concerning patients and concerning the discoveries, and the works, done by the science persons. For example we on the side 1, are learning how the first great American screen idol, Tom Mix, back in the year 1931, when he developed a stomachache and thereby nearly having no chance in surviving, (precisely the same happened to me, back in the year 1963, when I was 16 years old, and I was close to dying). Opposite to all odds Tom Mix was cured, as his doctor was having more knowledge than normal for the doctors, and thereby knew a person to contact for with help from him trying to cure in another way, by the Phage Therapy, when there was no chance when using the normal known methods. But we already, on the side ix, in the book, are reading about a case of Fred Bledsoe, who in 2002, stepped on a rusty nail, which resulted in so bad infection that the doctor advised him to have his foot amputated. But by an accident, a friend to him, in TV saw the episode "Silent Killers", in the CBS news program "48 hours", and thereby learned about the world's oldest institute concerning Phage, laying in Tbilisi in Georgia. And he ended traveling to this strange place, and he then was cured. And the book finish with on the side 123 starting a parallel case, actual about Laura Robert, who none of the doctors expected to be living past the end of 2005. And after she also, in TV, by an accident saw the program "48 hours", then went to Georgia and was totally cured. And in the history concerning the discovery of the Phage, we on the side 83 starts reading about how the English scientist, M. E. Hankin, in 1896, when living in India, set out to discover why the people could bath in Ganges river without getting sick. When epidemics of Cholera swept through central India, and when people were using the river for anything besides bath, for cloth washing, and even dumping partly burnt corpses into the Ganges. And by research he could conclude that the water was containing an antiseptic which acted on the Cholera germ. But it was Felix d'Herelle who discovered the Phage, by two cases, and then clearly being able to talk about it, and making more research. As we learn on the side 7, when he first during research, discovered and was wondering why some of his bacterial cultures had died. But It was first when he again in 1916, during the war, when he was analyzing stool from soldier, discovered his taches verges again, that he started working on this strange discovery. And we read about the fighting between d'Herelle and his chief and other persons about this Phage, among other, whether the Phages are living organism or not, or if it's something made by the bacteria's or not. But especially it's interesting to learn how little doctor

education d'Herelle was getting, but mostly was being educated by himself. But through the book we are getting many parallel cases telling how persons, during the last 20 years, by accidents, are rediscovered, the Phage Therapy, and then, especially since the year 2000, have started working in groups for making firms working with the Phage Therapy. That is especially to work on the discovering on the actual Phages to the actual sickness, as there is thought to be around 100,000 different Phages, and each Phage only is working on one special bacteria. A highly interesting book concerning Phage Therapy which we without doubt, in the future, will be hearing much more about.

While the book describes an important narrative in the potential for phage therapy, I feel that it falls short of truly captivating the reader in the history of the bacteriophage, which is mostly due to poor editing etiquette (as in referencing to one individual by 2 or 3 different names, which can be quite confusing when someone's last name is used 5 times in a row and then their first name is used outside of speech). I would have also liked to see more of an explanation/ in-depth look at current phage technologies and practices.

This book describes the history of "phage" therapy, the use of bacteriophages (a type of virus) to treat bacterial infections. While antibiotics are usually effective, phages are an alternative treatment that have the advantage of having much smaller side effects since each type of phage targets very specific bacteria, unlike antibiotics. On the other hand, this makes phages more difficult to use, since one needs to find the right type of phage (out of thousands and thousands of types) to treat your disease. The book covers phage therapy starting from their discovery in the early 1900's to today, where several companies have been trying to commercialize the technology. It's a fascinating journey, and I couldn't help thinking that phage therapy would be much more common in the U.S. if only phages didn't occur naturally, which makes it hard for drug companies to charge a lot of money for them. In any case, it makes me feel a little safer in this age of antibiotic-resistant supergerms to know there are other treatments out there (even if apparently not that many U.S. doctors do), and I thank Ms. Kuchment for her interesting and educational account.

This book has amazing content, and is so well written.

Excellent history lesson on phage therapy, which starts with the beginning and ends with today. The narrative is concise but thorough. It is easy to read and scientifically sound.

excellent review of little used therapy

If you don't know about phage, this is the book to read!

Anna Kuchment tells the backstory to Phage that I really never knew. I wonder how many in American Biology today have never heard this story.

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