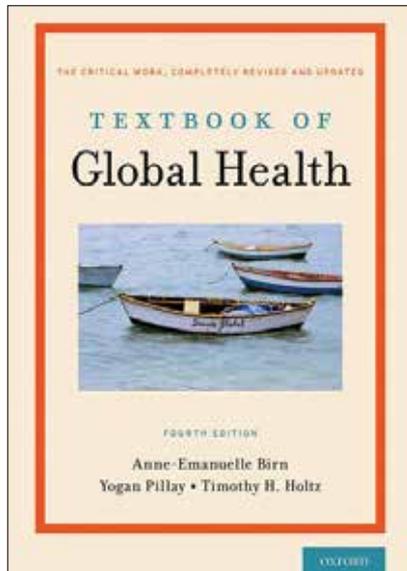


# BOOK REVIEW



## Textbook of Global Health

By A-E Birn, Y Pillay and T H Holtz.  
4th ed. New York: Oxford University  
Press, 2017. ISBN: 9780199392285

Coinciding with a renewed focus on health needs and disease in the global south, the Millennium Development Goal era saw the emergence and widespread use of the term 'global health'. The term has been associated with greatly increased funding flows and the mobilisation of a panoply of individual and institutional actors under the banner of global health. But what exactly does 'global health' mean? Definitional debates have abounded, centred particularly in northern academic public health institutions, where departments and programmes in global health have

become the norm. In 2008, Stuckler and McKee<sup>[1]</sup> suggested that global health is in fact a malleable metaphor, describing and legitimising a wide variety of practices, rather than a single concept. Therefore, for some, global health is really another name for international health, which itself was a recasting of tropical medicine (and colonial medicine before that). For others, it is about the agenda of global security in the face of new threats such as the Ebola or Zika viruses, or the architecture of global players (whether the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) seeking to influence health developments across the globe.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the context of these multiple meanings, the *Textbook of Global Health* is a highly welcome and significant arrival. Written from a refreshingly critical 'political economy' perspective that is often absent in discourse on global health, it provides the most coherent and systematic framing of the field currently available to scholars and practitioners. Reflecting shifts in thinking and terminology, the textbook is an update of the 2009 3rd edition, which was entitled *Textbook of International Health*. A full chapter is devoted to outlining the continuities and differences between international and global health, while another provides an overview of current global health actors and activities. As with previous editions, the textbook properly locates contemporary global health in a longer history of changing world orders, stretching back to colonialism, and the rise of agencies such as the WHO post-World War II.

Within this clear overarching framework, the book then addresses all the major themes

of global health: global patterns of disease, equity and social determinants of health, globalisation, trade and health, the rise of humanitarianism, climate change, health systems and health financing. It concludes with chapters on 'building healthy societies' and social-justice approaches to global health, inviting readers to consider 'how the world order might be reimagined and rearranged'. It is a weighty tome of 712 pages, and each of the themes is dealt with expertly and thoroughly.

From a pedagogical point of view, the chapters are laid out sequentially as a course on global health, and include key questions and lessons. While such courses are, in reality, unusual in South Africa (SA) or the region, individual chapters will be very useful for general public health programmes and for courses on globalisation and health. One of the three co-authors is Dr Yogan Pillay, deputy director-general in the National Department of Health, and the approaches and content of the textbook will resonate with many in SA. I highly recommend the *Textbook of Global Health* as an incredible resource for educators, researchers and practitioners concerned with situating their work in a wider global reality.

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1. Stuckler D, McKee M. Five metaphors about global-health policy. *Lancet* 2008;372(9633):95-96. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(08\)61013-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(08)61013-2)
2. Sheikh K, Schneider H, Agyepong IA, Lehmann U, Gilson L. Boundary-spanning: Reflections on the principles and practice of global health. *BMJ Glob Health* 2016;1:e000058. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2016-000058>