Inside the Outbreaks: The Elite Medical Detectives of the Epidemic Intelligence Service

Mark Pendergrast
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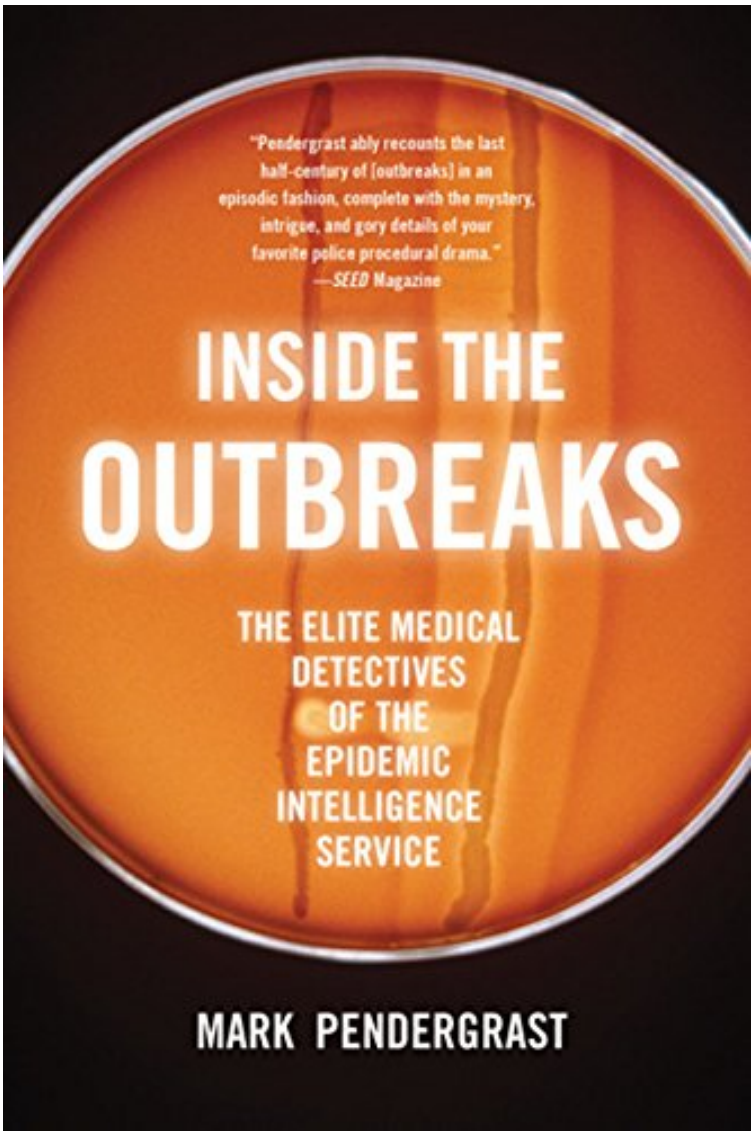

#623698 in Books Mark Pendergrast 2011-04-13 2011-04-13Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.00 x 1.11 x 5.31l, .85 #File Name: 0547520301440 pagesInside the Outbreaks The Elite Medical Detectives of the Epidemic Intelligence Service | File size: 69.Mb

Mark Pendergrast : Inside the Outbreaks: The Elite Medical Detectives of the Epidemic Intelligence Service before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Inside the Outbreaks: The Elite Medical Detectives of the Epidemic Intelligence Service:

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Since its founding in 1951, the Epidemic Intelligence Service has waged war on every imaginable ailment. When an epidemic hits, the EIS will be there to crack the case, however mysterious or deadly, saving countless lives in the process. Over the years they have successfully battled polio, cholera, and smallpox, to name a few, and in recent years have turned to the epidemics killing us nowsmoking, obesity, and gun violence among them. The successful EIS model has spread internationally: former EIS officers on the staff of the Centers for Disease Control have helped to establish nearly thirty similar programs around the world. EIS veterans have gone on to become leaders in the world of public health in organizations such as the World Health Organization. Inside the Outbreaks takes readers on a riveting journey through the history of this remarkable organization, following Epidemic Intelligence Service officers on their globetrotting quest to eliminate the most lethal and widespread threats to the worlds health.

.com Product Description Since its founding in 1951, the Epidemic Intelligence Service has waged war on every imaginable ailment. When an epidemic hits, the EIS will be there to crack the case, however mysterious or deadly, saving countless lives in the process. Over the years they have successfully battled polio, cholera, and smallpox, to name a few, and in recent years have turned to the epidemics killing us now--smoking, obesity, and gun violence among them. The successful EIS model has spread internationally: former EIS officers on the staff of the Centers for Disease Control have helped to establish nearly thirty similar programs around the world. EIS veterans have gone on to become leaders in the world of public health in organizations such as the World Health Organization.Inside the Outbreaks takes readers on a riveting journey through the history of this remarkable organization, following Epidemic Intelligence Service officers on their globetrotting quest to eliminate the most lethal and widespread threats to the world's health. An Exclusive Essay by Mark Pendergrast, Author of Inside the Outbreaks I first heard about the Epidemic Intelligence Service when an old high school friend, Andy Vernon, e-mailed me in 2004 to say that he thought I should write a history of the EIS. I had never heard of it. Andy had been an EIS officer in the late 1970s and had gone on to a career at the Centers for Disease Control, where he still works, studying tuberculosis. I was intrigued to find that this organization sent disease detectives all over the world as first responders. I knew little about microbes or epidemiology, although I had written about the epi of caffeine in two of my previous books (For God, Country Coca-Cola and Uncommon Grounds). My lack of knowledge was not a deterrent. Rather, it was an enticement. I like to learn new things, in new areas. Every area of human endeavor has its own special way of looking at the world, its own vocabulary and culture. But we're all humans, so it isnt that hard to learn. I also like to write about things that matter. I am not nave enough to think that what I write will change the world in any huge way, but I like to think that my books challenge people to look at the world in a more nuanced, in-depth way. Or to put it another way, I hope that my books make people more curious, more informed. In this case, I was intrigued when I discovered that the EIS was founded in 1951 because of fears about bioterrorism during the Korean War. The founder of the service, Alexander Langmuir, was a towering, somewhat intimidating presence, and the EIS officers had been involved in just about every major public health threat in the post-World War II era. Each investigation was a kind of mystery story. In other words, it looked like a lot of fun, and it would give me an excuse to travel to Africa, a continent I had never visited. Plus, I grew up in Atlanta and had never heard of the EIS, which is based there. That made it all the more intriguing. As I conducted research for a book proposal and began to interview EIS alums (it is a two-year program, so there are more than three thousand of them), I was impressed with their thoughtfulness, clarity, and dedication to the people's welfare. I had never really thought about what "public health" meant, but I came to realize that in trying to halt the spread of epidemics, they were in a sense treating the general public the same way a clinical physician treats an individual patient. And EIS officers could have a far greater impact on far more people. Yet such epidemiologists are underappreciated because their work is largely invisible. They may have saved my life, or yours, but we wouldn't know it. So writing Inside the Outbreaks would, I hoped, educate people about the importance of such work and the importance of funding it properly. It will come as no surprise to anyone that public health has always been (and still is) very poorly funded, even though a good public health approach--involving surveillance, prevention, intervention, and planning--ultimately saves millions of dollars as well as lives. (Photo Betty Molnar) A QA with Mark Pendergrast Q:

What is the EIS and why have we never heard of it? A: The Epidemic Intelligence Service is a two-year service and training program of the Centers for Disease Control Prevention, the CDC. It began in 1951, during the height of Cold War paranoia over possible biological warfare during the Korean War--hence the name, which implied a sort of medical equivalent to the Central Intelligence Agency. It is indeed the most important (and effective) government agency of which you have never heard. EIS officers have investigated many famous epidemics, but they generally maintain a low profile. Q: What is the significance of the EIS logo, with the damaged shoe? A: The logo features the world globe with a shoe superimposed on it, a hole prominent in the shoe's sole. EIS officers call themselves "shoeleather epidemiologists" because during investigations they get out into the field, right into the middle of an outbreak. Hence the worn-out shoe, though they have also traveled by dogsled, elephant, camel, dugout canoe, and helicopter, to mention a few modes of transportation. Q: How big is the Epidemic Intelligence Service? Can you tell us a little about how it operates? A: In recent years about 80 new EIS officers enter the program for July training in Atlanta. There are now over 3,000 EIS veterans, most of whom have gone on to careers in public health, either at the CDC, state health departments, the World Health Organization, the Gates Foundation, or schools of public health. How do they operate? An EIS officer is usually pretty young (average age around 34, and more than half are women, though at the onset most were men). About 20% are minorities, with a substantial international component. They are on call 24 hours a day. Many stay at the CDC and specialize in a particular area, such as foodborne/diarrheal diseases or influenza. Others are stationed within state health departments and serve as "general practitioners" of public health, chasing any kind of outbreak. All are subject to being sent at a moment's notice to an emergency anywhere in the world. Q: Is the EIS program unique to the United States? A: No. The EIS program has spawned clones and imitators around the world. There are now 36 such programs serving 82 countries, with plans to develop eight new programs to serve 11 additional countries. EIS alums have helped to start all of them. Q: Your stories of EIS exploits are really amazing, particularly how they helped to identify new diseases and their causes. Can you name some of them? A: There are so many! Let's see. EIS officers started the first poison control program in the United States, saved the polio vaccine program by identifying which vaccines contained live instead of killed virus, pioneered the identification and control of hospital infections, learned that people could contract rabies from bats without being bitten, helped to eradicate smallpox, realized that even unbroken eggs could carry Salmonella, first identified E. coli O157:H7 as a lethal pathogen, were pivotal in testing oral rehydration therapy for cholera, started the first surveillance system of birth defects and helped to identify folic acid as a prevention for Spina bifida, proved that aspirin caused Reye syndrome, that toxic shock syndrome was caused by super-absorbent tampons, and that Lyme disease came from ticks. They pioneered effective disaster relief, blew the whistle on lead poisoning from smelters, and identified vinyl chloride in PVC factories as the cause of a rare, lethal liver cancer. They first identified Lassa fever, Ebola, Legionnaires' disease, and Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome. They investigated mass hysteria in schools, sick building syndrome, the Dalkon Shield, forced sterilizations, homicidal nurses, and terrorist anthrax letters. Do you want me to go on? I haven't mentioned solving listeriosis, identifying AIDS, finding Cryptosporidium in drinking water, battling rotavirus, multiple-drug-resistant tuberculosis, botulism, yellow fever, parasites, pesticides-- Q: Do EIS officers combat only infectious diseases? A: No, they try to study and prevent virtually every threat to public health. I already talked about lead poisoning and other environmental problems, as well as psychological problems and criminal activity. EIS officers have also studied tobacco, cancer clusters, obesity, heat waves, binge drinking, violence, suicides, and injuries (they don't like the word "accident"). Unfortunately, problems stemming primarily from human behavior are harder to combat and solve than threats from microbes--even though microbes are also devious and opportunistic. From Publishers WeeklyPlucky epidemiologists track the world's ailments in this hectic public health saga. Pendergrast (For God, Country and Coca-Cola) chronicles the exploits of the doctors, nurses, statisticians, and sociologists of the Centers for Disease Control's Epidemic Intelligence Service, who jet around investigating the causes and remedies of disease outbreaks from Alabama to Zaire. Looming large is the ever-present, life-threatening problem of diarrhea, whose outbreaks they trace variously to contaminated water, iffy tofu, and Oregon cultists who in 1984 sprinkled salmonella into restaurant salad bars. The investigators also take on more exotic cases, including Ebola outbreaks, the post-9/11 anthrax letters, and a grade-school itching epidemic that turned out to be mass hysteria. These epidemiologists have also led long campaigns to eradicate smallpoxin Pendergrast's telling, an epic struggle against both germs and cultural prejudicesand tried to abate social ills like smoking, obesity, and gun violence. There's not much story-telling frippery in Pendergrast's episodic six-decade narrative, just bare-bones accounts of barely individuated sleuths busting one microbial perp after another by collecting samples and conducting surveys. Still the scientific fight against these cunning, deadly pathogens makes for an often engrossing browse. Photos. (Apr. 13) From BooklistWherever widespread illness breaks out, agents of the Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) will likely be dispatched to investigate. Operating under the auspices of the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this corps of highly trained professionals, first assembled in 1951 when federal authorities feared biological warfare following WWII, has proven its worth many times over, stemming outbreaks of major diseases ranging from smallpox to polio. The work can be grindingly boring as agents interview victims and follow clues to an outbreaks origins, but it

is imperative for helping prevent further contamination, disease, and death. While EIS efforts arent 100 percent effective, the successes far outnumber the failures and have garnered international recognition. Mentioned in a number of books about such illnesses as Lyme disease and food-borne infections, the unsung heroes of the EIS get their due in this lengthy history and paean to their service. --Donna Chavez