The international vaccine scene

This leads neatly to the section on Vaccines and bioterrorism which summarises vaccine possibilities for the control of smallpox, anthrax and the viral haemorrhagic fevers. There are, however, several possible bacterial and viral bioterrorism agents not covered in this section — tularemia and plague being common contenders — perhaps a sad omission.

There have been huge changes in vaccine types, schedules, and delivery modes, and the penultimate section, Regulatory and safety issues, sheds some interesting light on the views of vaccine providers, particularly governments and other public authorities, the (mainly private) vaccine producers, and vaccine recipients, with respect to the safety of vaccines. The consumer perspective is contributed by David Salisbury, the Principal Medical Officer for the UK Department of Health. Some legal aspects of vaccine safety are a welcome inclusion, although a chapter (conference paper) on legal and jurisdictional issues would not have gone amiss here.

The final section on Vaccines, prevention and public health addresses a number of important challenges, including the place for preventive programs, financing issues, and what might be needed if diseases are to be prevented or eradicated with vaccines.

The book lacks an index, making it difficult to follow some threads, such as the financing models and innovative vaccine ideas. Also missing from the book is a summary and discussion of the expanded program of immunisation (EPI), a core feature of the world's immunisation strategy preventing millions of childhood deaths from communicable diseases every year. For students and practitioners needing general information about current vaccines in an Australian context, the current immunisation handbook (NHMRC 2003) contains all the information likely to be needed. For people needing insight into the ways people think about vaccines, vaccine development, and how vaccines contribute to public health control of communicable diseases, Vaccines: preventing disease & protecting health is a fascinating and useful book.

*A great deal of information about the EPI can be found at the UNICEF website at http://www.unicef.org/

Priscilla Robinson
School of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, La Trobe University, VIC.

