Investigative journalist Sonia Shah’s new book, *Pandemic*, arrives at a key time, as the global health community is sorting through lessons learned from the spread of Ebola in West Africa, the cholera epidemic in Haiti, and concerns about emerging new viruses in different parts of the world. The author’s premise is that we should be worried about pandemics, and she makes the cogent case that pathogens will continue to challenge our health systems and the global community.

This is contrary to beliefs expressed in the mid-twentieth century, when epidemiologists, medical historians, and experts were convinced that infectious disease had been conquered and that noncommunicable diseases would become the primary medical concern. Bringing together personal, journalistic, historical, and scientific information, *Pandemic* analyzes the sweeping history of infectious disease and the rise of epidemics over the past two centuries. Factors such as growing means of locomotion, increasing crowding of people into cities, and failure to deal with filth are relevant in understanding today’s emerging diseases, as well.

Shah provides deep explanations of how pathogens cross species barriers and transform animal diseases into human diseases, and she describes her experience with an infection of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* in her son. She presents an inside view of “wet markets” in China, where animals are kept in close quarters and exposed to disease from other animals, and she visits the pig farms and South Asian wetlands where cholera first emerged in Bangladesh.

Broader societal issues, such as corruption, also contribute to the spread of disease, and societal reactions can disrupt efforts to combat disease, Shah notes. For example, corruption played a leading role in preventing the arrival of clean water in New York City in the early 1800s, contributing to cholera epidemics that killed thousands of people. More recently, health workers attempting to vaccinate children were incorrectly blamed as playing a part in the spread of disease—and were attacked and killed in parts of Nigeria and Pakistan.

To protect ourselves against emerging diseases in the future, Shah suggests that we need “sustained engagement with both the formidable threat that pathogens pose and our own critical role in shaping [that threat].” She draws the connections between climate change and pathogens in the resurgence of old diseases and the emergence of new ones. Shah recommends that we improve the tracking of emerging contagions and collaborate more globally on disease surveillance. She also supports the idea of predicting epidemics much as weather is predicted—through forecasting. Following the Ebola disaster, these are exactly the kinds of proposals that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Health Organization, and the World Bank are considering. *Pandemic* provides readers with an understanding of why such steps are both necessary and urgently needed.

—Margaret Saunders, deputy editor

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While reports of forced quarantines on travelers returning to the United States, fear and panic about a spreading disease, and controversy surrounding vaccination may sound like a retrospective of public health issues faced in 2015, in the case of *The Fever of 1721* they are part of a recounting of the events surrounding the first experiments of smallpox inoculation in colonial America.

*The Fever of 1721* by Stephen Coss details the worst smallpox epidemic in Boston’s history, set against the backdrop of a power struggle between the Massachusetts Bay Colony and England with a cast of familiar figures—Cotton Mather, Benjamin Franklin, and Elisha Cooke Jr.

As the 1721 smallpox outbreak accelerated, Mather, a Puritan preacher, defied convention and risked his reputation by advocating for an inoculation experiment. He convinced physician Zabdiel Boylston to try the inoculation procedure, based largely on slave testimony that it was effective. Both men faced a severe backlash in the community, including threats of vigilante violence. Boylston worried about being accused of murder if a patient died.

As October 1721 drew to a close, smallpox had reached its deadly peak: 400 deaths in a single month. By the end of the epidemic nearly half of Boston residents had fallen ill with smallpox, and nearly a tenth had died from it. Boylston had inoculated 280 people, and only six had died—indicating that those who were inoculated had much better odds than those who contracted the disease.

The public debate about the safety of inoculation took place in newspapers, driving unprecedented gains in readership and sales. Ben Franklin’s older brother James, also a printer, helped launch the nation’s first independent newspaper, notable in this case because the motive behind its inception was an anti-inoculation rhetoric. Personal insults in the media far preceded the Internet and cable news: Mather and Boylston were constant targets of the press, James Franklin insulted government, religion, and science. It ultimately landed him in jail, but the precedent was set.

Coss weaves together these threads of social, political, and scientific advances as he tells the tale of “the most important anonymous year in the evolution of modern medicine and American liberty.”

—Rachel Dolan, special assistant to the editor-in-chief