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Fungal disease—And the power of stories

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There are many fungal disease challenges. Superficial and mucosal infections are very common and fortunately rarely lethal. Transmission of dermatophyte infection occurs readily and global spread is well documented for most pathogens. Eradication seems unlikely and few drivers exist for a vaccine. Recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis affects over 130 million women annually and nearly half a billion have a period in their lives when this infection is problematic. Even more concerning are the serious and life-threatening or sight-threatening infections. The early clinical features of most of these infections are so subtle and the patients so complex, that good clinical acumen is not enough to really impact on these infections. From the laboratory perspective, the same organism can cause many different infectious and/or allergic processes, so detection of a fungal pathogen alone usually does not fully define disease. Integration of clinical and imaging data with mycological (and often histological) data is essential to define each infection and therefore select the optimal therapy. This requires a high level of skill and co-ordination, and time. As a result of this intrinsic reality of invasive and chronic fungal disease, accurate determination of the burden of fungal diseases has been difficult to ascertain and is much larger than usually documented for several reasons. So awareness of the issues is not what it should be.

Yet the field of fungal disease is awash with stunning stories – of tragedy and lost lives, of horrendous skin, bone, brain and lung disease, of recovery and life regained against all odds, of human endeavor to bring products to market despite massive hurdles, of the extraordinary biology found in human fungal pathogens and their interaction with human tissues, of dedicated scientists and their revealing discoveries, of the hard working diagnostic scientists, physicians and surgeons managing complex clinical situations with superb skill, and more.

These stories need telling. The world will listen because so many are amazing.