Yellow Fever

An unfinished history

Yellow fever was one of the biggest public health challenges in the Americas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dr Jaime Benchimol charts the history of the disease in Brazil, covering the speculation on modes of transmission in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the identification of the disease’s viral etiology in 1928-1929, and later, the discovery of urban and sylvatic cycles of disease transmission.

While the yellow fever virus still circulates in rural woodlands, there have been no recent urban outbreaks in Brazil. Instead, it has been replaced by dengue, which is transmitted by the same mosquito vector. Why has yellow fever not continued to spread in urban environments teeming with the same mosquitoes that played host to the virus in the past? Dr Benchimol explores some hypotheses in response to this question.

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