



The Anthrax Letters: A Medical Detective Story

Leonard A. Cole

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At 2:00am on October 2, 2001, Robert Stevens entered a hospital emergency room. Feverish, nauseated, and barely conscious, no one knew what was making him sick. It was the doctors and public health officials who solved this medical mystery. Stevens was the first fatal victim of bioterrorism in America.

The events of September 11th and the anthrax attacks that followed only three weeks later were horrifying. Many of us felt we were living in a world gone mad. Already shaken by the images of jetliners deliberately flown into the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center, we were soon scared to open our mail. No longer could we look forward to birthday wishes or holiday postcards. We couldn't even safely face the delivery of our monthly bills. We had now become literally afraid of the microbial menace that could be lurking in our mailboxes. This time terror had struck close to home to everyone's home.

But behind the panic and the politics was a key line of defense. While the police and FBI frantically investigated a crime, there were other professionals at work, conducting their own painstaking inquiry - medical and scientific detectives hot on the trail of deadly organisms deliberately set loose in the postal system. Modern heroes in a quickly changing world, the public health officials, physicians, researchers, and scientists who staff our hospitals, clinics, and laboratories will be the first responders on the scene of any future biowarfare event.

Conducting his own detective work, bioterrorism expert Leonard Cole has composed a series of fascinating stories that get to the heart of all the noisy sound bytes and hysterical headlines. Cole is the only person outside law enforcement to have interviewed every one of the surviving inhalation-anthrax victims, along with the relatives, friends, and associates of those who died, as well as the public health officials, scientists, researchers, hospital workers, and treating physicians - indeed, anyone who has something of value to add to the story. Speaking through their voices, the narrative reflects the tension and emotions stirred by the events from the fall of 2001.

Fast paced and riveting, this minute-by-minute chronicle of the anthrax attacks recounts more than a history of recent current events, it uncovers the untold and perhaps even more important story of how scientists, doctors, and researchers perform life-saving work under intense pressure and public scrutiny. *The Anthrax Letters* amply demonstrates how vulnerable America and the world really were in 2001. It also shows quite clearly how scientific research promises to strengthen our ability to address the challenges we must meet in the future.

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