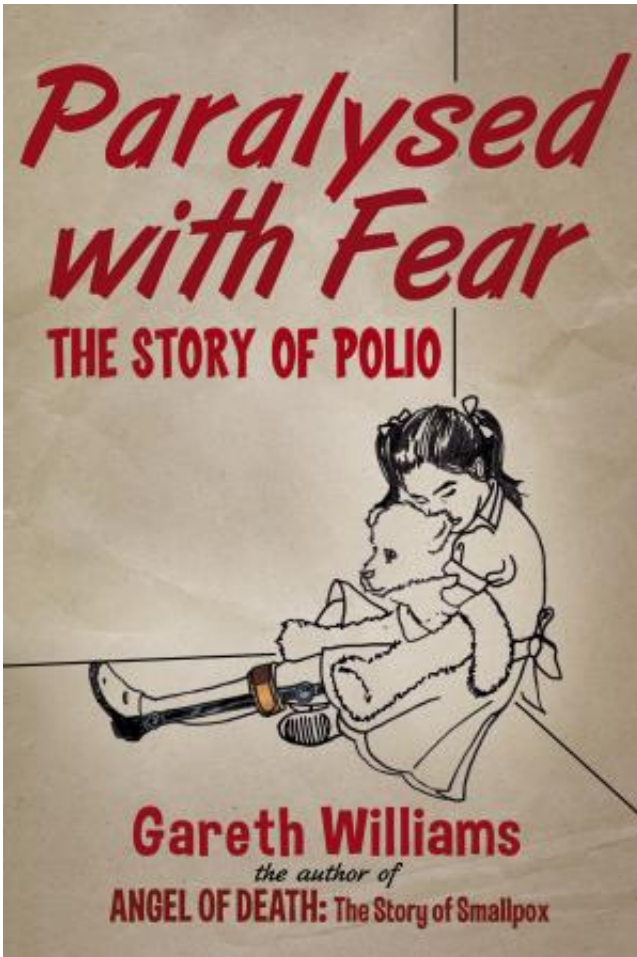


Paralysed with fear: The story of polio

June 19 2013



Book cover for 'Paralysed with fear: the story of polio' by Gareth Williams published by Palgrave Macmillan. Credit: Palgrave Macmillan

Thanks to vaccination, polio has been pushed to the brink of extinction – but can we finish the job? This is one of the big questions which a

Bristol academic addresses in his new book, published next week.

Gareth Williams, Professor of Medicine at the University of Bristol, has produced the first comprehensive history of polio for over 40 years. *Paralysed with fear: the story of polio* explores the experiences of victims alongside the medical and scientific landmarks in the history of the disease.

According to a review by *The Lancet*: "Williams has written a story about good and evil, successfully making poliovirus a villain in a gripping, multiact play. His book should be read by anyone interested in science, medicine, history, and public health. And by anyone interested in an incredible story told by a great storyteller."

Mankind's struggle against polio has been one of the [grand challenges](#) of [modern medicine](#) – and a battleground between good and bad science. Some research won [Nobel Prizes](#) while other work was flawed or fraudulent, holding up progress and endangering patients' lives.

Professor Williams uncovers how peculiar scientific ideas survived and thrived – partly due to the unrelenting pressure for medical scientists to produce results – and how the fear of polio was deliberately exploited in the USA to raise funds for polio research. He also looks at the legacy of the disease, from the establishment of rights for people with disabilities to the 'post-polio syndrome' which affects over 120,000 polio survivors in the UK.

The book also asks what the global eradication of polio will mean practically, and how much this would add to the current stalemate of near-eradication, when some argue that funds should be diverted into dealing with the great killers of children in the developing world, such as malaria and rotavirus-induced [diarrhoea](#).

Professor Williams said: "There are now only three countries left in the world where polio is endemic: northern Nigeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Getting rid of polio for all time is an achievable target, but the story of polio is full of twists and turns and a happy ending is not guaranteed – especially as the major obstacles now are due to human nature rather than anything to do with the [polio](#) virus or the limitations of the vaccines."

Provided by University of Bristol

Citation: Paralysed with fear: The story of polio (2013, June 19) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-06-paralysed-story-polio.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.