ANIL AGGRAWAL'S
Internet Journal of Book Reviews
A sister journal of AAIJFMT · Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology

VOL. 6, NO. 1 · JANUARY – JUNE 2007
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Interview with Susan Aldridge

THE INTERVIEW

Susan Aldridge

HOW TO CITE

Interview with Susan Aldridge. *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews*. 2007;6(1).

Author Susan Mary Aldridge has worked for the last 14 years, on a freelance basis, as European News Reporter for Genetic Engineering News, a leading trade journal for the biotechnology industry published by Mary Ann Liebert in New York, with a worldwide controlled circulation of around 55,000.

Susan Aldridge



Besides writing books, Susan does a lot of web-based writing too. She contributes the daily English medical news column to the Web-based Health Education Foundation (Santa Fe, USA), which aims to inform and educate on healthy living and the latest medical research. She also writes a weekly news update for the Novartis transplantation website. She also produced the fortnightly newsletter

alerting visitors to new articles on healthandage.com and has written two series of the Novartis newletter 'Living with Eczema' to support Elidel, the non-steroidal treatment for the condition. She has written several articles for the biomedical science research web-site and journal BiomedCentral. More recently, she produced a series of booklets for patients and health professionals for Roche, to support those involved in interferon treatment for Hepatitis C.

To read reviews of Susan's books, more of her thoughts about writing, her annotated list of excellent books for writers, or to contact the author, visit her website: http://www.susana.co.uk/

We at the "Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews" approached her for an online interview and she graciously agreed. The interview was conducted for well over a month by Biman Basu, one of the chief editorial board members of this journal. Some excerpts.. ..

Her brief is to cover developments in the UK and mainland European biotechnology industry producing company profiles and conference reports. In the last year or so, much of her work for GEN has involved covering the development of biotech clusters in areas such as Scotland, Cambridge, Paris, Munich and Basel.

From August 1994-November 2001, Susan worked for two days a week as the Medical Editor of Focus (now BBC Focus) magazine, the award-winning science and technology monthly then published by Gruner and Jahr and is now a freelance contributor on psychology. She is now on the BBC Focus Advisory Board. She has also contributed to a wide range of newspapers and magazines including New Scientist and Chemistry in Britain.

Susan has also written and edited articles for the new Focus section of the Royal Society of Chemistry's rapid communications journal ChemComm.

Her main books are (i) Drug Addiction - a title in the 'Use Your Mind' series edited by Rita Carter (published by Cassell Illustrated, June 2005), (ii) Seeing Red & Feeling Blue: The new understanding of mood and emotion (published by Century, May 2000) (iii) Magic Molecules: How Drugs Work (Published by Cambridge University Press)

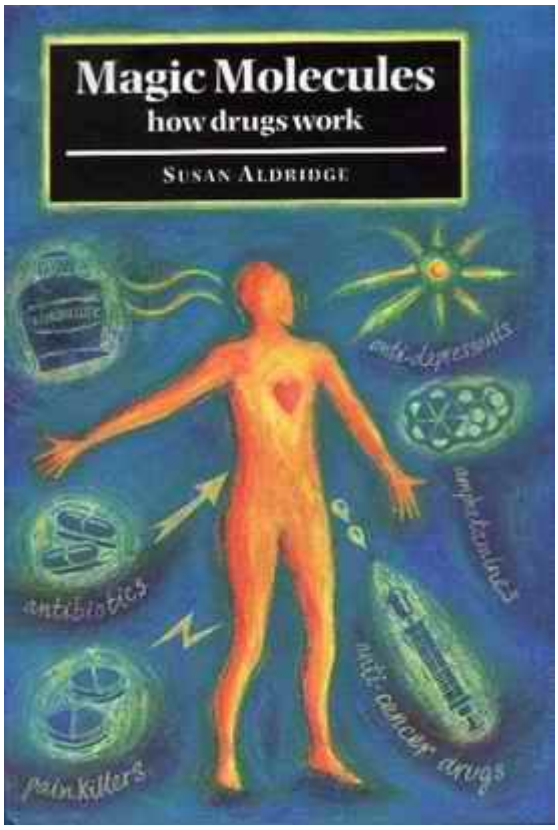
To read reviews of Susan's excellent books, more of her thoughts about writing, her annotated list of excellent books for writers, or to contact the author, visit her website: http://www.susana.co.uk/

Her book Magic Molecules: How Drugs Work (Cambridge University Press, 1998) won rave reviews in our journal. Naturally we couldn't contain our desire to know more about her. We at the "Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews" approached him for an online interview and she graciously agreed. The interview was conducted for well over a month by the reviewer himself - Biman Basu. Some excerpts....)

Qu.1. You have an M.Sc. in biotechnology, a postgraduate certificate in science education, and a Ph.D. in biochemistry. You also have been involved in medical research. What made you take up a career in popular science writing?

Ans. I have always found it easier to write than do lab experiments and I was lucky enough to have a couple of articles published in New Scientist in the late 1980s, which led to my writing career.

Cover jacket of Susan Aldridge's Best selling book. Click cover to read its review published in this journal



Q 2. What prompted you write this book on drugs? Was there any specific reason?

Ans. I was always looking for scientific subjects that interested me and had not been much written about. Strangely, no one had really brought together pharmaceuticals and recreational drugs in a popular way and to me that was an interesting challenge.

Q 3. Today, misuse and overuse of drugs is a serious problem, as it is giving rise to highly drug-resistant species of some the most dangerous pathogens. In your opinion, what is the level of awareness about the dangers of indiscriminate medication that exists today in both developed and undeveloped countries?

Ans. Yes, this is a big problem, especially with respect to antibiotics, although people also become resistant to anti-cancer drugs as well. Countries where antibiotics are available over the counter have a particular issue with this.

Q 4. Why do think such a situation exists? Is it because doctors who prescribe the medicines do not adequately warn the patients of the harmful effects of overuse? Or is it because patients do not heed the advice of doctors?

Ans. Many infections will clear up without treatment - and the doctor and patient both need to be aware of this. So a prescription is not always needed. If fewer prescriptions are written for antibiotics, I think the problem of resistance could lessen. Also, it is important for people - both doctors and the public - to be less complacent about the spread of infection by being more careful about personal hygiene, particularly hand washing.

Q 5. Your book can certainly go a long way in educating the public about the subject, but do you think something more is needed?

Ans. Not everyone is motivated to buy and read a book. Good and accurate information on science and medicine in newspapers and on the Internet is essential as this is where many people learn the

latest news. It doesn't help when basic errors are made - such as describing MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) as a virus when it is a bacterium! I often see this mistake in English newspapers.

Q. 6 How do you look at the role of the electronic media in creating public awareness about the subject?

Ans. I've been working for a medical/health website called healthandage.com for the last five years and enjoy preparing a daily news column. We get feedback and questions from all over the world, so the electronic media clearly play an important role for many in creating awareness of medical and science issues.

Q 7. In your book you have mentioned about gene therapy. Till date this technique has achieved only limited success. What do you think are the factors responsible for this lack of success?

Ans. I think the mapping of the human genome was really only the beginning of understanding our genes and it may be that some researchers thought, too early, that we could actually use therapy to alter our genetic makeup without understanding the full picture. It appears that there are many technical issues to solve, such as targeting the therapeutic gene to the right place in the cell.

Biman Basu - The interviewer



Biman Basu, the interviewer has written over 15 books, most of which have been translated in several languages. He has been associated with science writing for more than four decades. He is one of India's star interviewers having interviewed such eminent scientists as Herman Bondi, Roger Penrose, and Nobel laureates Severo Ochoa, and George Porter. He has been associated with *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews* since its inception.

Q 8. Do you believe that drugs in future could actually be designed for individuals depending on his/her genetic make-up?

Ans. Yes, in fact I believe this is far more advanced than the idea of gene therapy.

Q 9. If it became possible, then at what cost?

Ans. At the moment, so-called personalised medicine relies on microarray technology, which is expensive. But, like all other gene technologies, the price is sure to fall. And we can also offset against this the savings in healthcare from prescribing a patient the right medicine for them.

Q 10. With the cost of drug development going sky high and the patent regime firmly in place, do you agree with the view that most of the newer life-saving drugs may be beyond the reach of the poor? Is there a way out of this dilemma?

Ans. Yes, I agree that many new drugs are not available to those in the developing world, which is unethical. However, there are a few voices within the pharmaceutical industry and in the non-

governmental organisations calling for change and we have to support them and hope they will have some impact.

Q 11. Are you working on any other book at present?

Ans. I am about to start work on a medical encyclopaedia. I am also working on a novel and a collection of short stories.

Magic Molecules: How Drugs Work is available at Amazon.com or BarnesandNoble.com (Click cover above to buy directly from Amazon at a discount through this journal). Readers can check the author's website for further details, **http://www.susana.co.uk/.**

*Susan loves hearing from readers. You can email her at **SusAldr@aol.com.***

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Interviews - Collective Index (Appearing in *Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews*)

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-Editor-in-Chief

of Volume 6, No. 1 (January - June 2007)