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ReAct Action on Antibiotic Resistance

ReAct Quarterly

No 1/2009

Antibiotics *Access and Excess*

Editorial by Liselotte Diaz Högberg, Deputy Director of ReAct

ReAct's vision is that current and future generations of people around the globe will have access to effective treatment of bacterial infections as part of their right to health. Working towards this goal means addressing both the problem of excess use to preserve the effect of existing drugs, but equally addressing the reverse problem of limited access in other settings to make sure that these potentially lifesaving drugs reaches those who need them the most.

New figures from Unicef show that only around 40 percent of children under five in sub-Saharan Africa with suspected pneumonia are taken to an appropriate health care provider, a proportion that has hardly changed at all during the last six years.

Antibiotic use in these children is in many countries reported to be as low as 10%.

Liselotte Diaz-Högberg, Deputy Director, ReAct

Even worse, we have to remember that these figures give us no information whether they are receiving ***effective*** antibiotics.

We know that resistance to cotrimoxasole, one of the most commonly used drugs to treat pneumonia is high in many populations, hardly being more effective than a sugar pill.

For neonatal sepsis, another urgent global health problem, up to 70% of all infections have been estimated not to respond to the WHO recommended first-line treatment.

Access to more expensive second- and third line alternatives that are still effective is limited for a large proportion of people.

This raises an important question. When discussing and measuring access to treatment of bacterial infections, should we be satisfied with merely counting those treated?

Or should we focus on what really matters, access to treatment that works? If so, antibiotic resistance can no longer be ignored.

EPN call to Action

Antimicrobial Resistance Workshop in Moshi, Tanzania in November 2008

The ReAct partner Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network (EPN) organized a 5 day workshop in Moshi, Tanzania 'Workshop on local and regional actions to address the problems with antimicrobial resistance.

Group photo of the participants at the AMR workshop in Moshi Tanzania November 2008. Photo: EPN

The highly appreaciated work-shop was attended by representatives from member organisations in 11 countries in Africa. The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Orient the staff of EPN member organisations on the serious threat posed by Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)
- Orient participants on the advocacy and containment actions to address this threat

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... EPN call to Action

- Inform participants on the approaches and tools developed by Management Sciences for Health and Strengthening Pharmaceutical Systems programs and other EPN partners in this regard.

Speaking on the clinical consequences of AMR, ReAct representative Bjorn Blomberg from the University of Bergen in Norway highlighted the infectious disease burden in African population and the need for local surveillance data to guide treatment.

The key outputs of the meeting were an EPN call to action on AMR and messages for various actors in health care delivery which will be disseminated in all appropriate fora.

Participants also made commitments to undertake local action within their countries and institutions on AMR advocacy and containment.

Read the full meeting report and the complete Moshi declaration here>

Ecumenical
Pharmaceutical
Network
www.epnetwork.org

Microbes and Metaphors

Re-imaging bacteria, infection and the body

A dialogue between scientists and artists, 5-9 Dec 2008 at Wee Jasper, Australia
By Mary Murray, Olle Nordberg and Satya Sivaraman

From 5 to 9 December 2008 a group of artists, scientists, social activists and journalists gathered at Cooradigbee Homestead, Wee Jasper in New South Wales, Australia, to begin a special mission. Set amidst open green pastures over spectacular undulating terrain and home to some of the globe's oldest fossil finds, their task was to pull together ideas from a wide range of human endeavours with the common purpose of re-defining the perception of microbes in the present world to evolve new images and metaphors of the dynamic relationship between microbes, human beings and other species.

Participants at the Microbes and Metaphors meeting

The thinking behind the dialogue was inspired by the report ***'Ending the War Metaphor: The Changing Agenda for Unravelling the Host–Microbe Relationship'***, organised by the Institute of Medicine of the US National Academy of Science; and by emerging scientific and artistic experimentation with bacterial art and ideas for learning from bacterial organisation.

The need for a new paradigm has become more urgent as the predominant metaphor of war, enemy and antibiotics as the main weapons against them, is inaccurate and inadequate as a response to the serious threat of antibiotic resistance. The Wee Jasper dialogue was intended to give fresh attention to the creation of new concepts and methods and allow them space and time to grow naturally.

Participants found that many shared a similar sense of limitation about the current paradigm. It takes time for images to develop and come to a mature expression and avoid cliches.

They all agreed that the interaction should continue and a full report from the meeting will be made available on www.reactgroup.org

A summary with photos and quotes from the participants can be downloaded here>