



Book review

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The evolving threat of antimicrobial resistance.

Options for action

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Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a major problem worldwide. The burden of AMR is greater in poor, developing countries where the problem has not been formally addressed.

In October 2011 the first global forum on antibiotic resistance held in New Delhi, India brought together a variety of stakeholders involved in the use of antibiotics. The World Health Organization (WHO) has been active in the field of AMR and has recently published a book highlighting the problem. The book addresses the major issues of surveillance to reduce antimicrobial use, measures to ensure better use of antibiotics, reducing antibiotic use in animal husbandry, infection control and prevention control techniques in health facilities, fostering innovation to facilitate the development and production of newer antibiotics and creating political commitment for action.

I strongly feel AMR is an issue which has not received the attention it deserves. Often the interests of the individual and the community with respect to antibiotics can be at loggerheads. The individual may want the newest, most effective antibiotics for treatment and may stop taking antibiotics once they start feeling better, saving on money and treatment costs. These measures can, however, cause problems like spreading resistance in the community and making antibiotics less effective.

The book has been divided into seven chapters dealing with different aspects of this complex problem. The first chapter introduces the problem of AMR. Most of the data is from the developed world including the European Union, the United States and Australia. The major difficulty in explaining the problem of AMR to health administrators and policy makers is objective economic data on the consequences of AMR in terms of cost and increased expenditure is not available.

Chapter two describes surveillance systems to track AMR. The data shows that surveillance networks for common pathogens are also present in developing nations. These have to be strengthened and the data should be widely disseminated. Community-based surveillance of AMR is of special importance in the developing world where a large percentage of antimicrobials are used in the community.

Chapter three deals with measures to improve antibiotic use. The book states that developed nations have been successful in implementing systems to reduce antibiotic use and decrease resistance. In the developing world not everyone has access to antimicrobials for a variety of reasons. At the same time as wealth increases, patients may be willing to spend more on treatment. Antibiotics are also increasingly being deployed in animal husbandry in the developing world. This is an issue developing nations are only beginning to address. Chapter five deals with infection prevention and control in healthcare facilities. Due to various reasons AMR is especially prone to occur in health facilities.

The number of new antibiotics successfully marketed has not kept pace with the increase in expenditures on pharmaceutical research and development according to Chapter six of the book which also describes a few recent initiatives to increase spending on, and stimulate development of, newer antimicrobials. The last chapter emphasises political commitment to tackle the problem of resistance. The list of references is comprehensive and URLs have been provided in many places. The colourful boxes, figures and tables add to and complement information provided in the text. The photographs at the beginning of each chapter often provide a human dimension to the material described in the text.

The appendix lists the recommendations of the 2001 WHO global strategy for containment of antimicrobial resistance and also the 2011 World Health day six-point brief. The book has been well produced and would be of interest to all those interested in the problem of antimicrobial resistance. The language used may, however, be difficult for laypersons to understand.



About the book:

World Health Organization: The evolving threat of antimicrobial resistance: Options for action. WHO, Geneva: 2012. ISBN: 978 92 4 150318 1

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http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2012/9789241503181_eng.pdf.