

# Misuse threatens antimicrobial effectiveness

Through overprescription and misuse, antibiotics are in danger of losing their effectiveness. And without urgent intervention, we are heading for a post-antibiotic era, in which common infections and minor injuries will become untreatable, according World Health Organisation (WHO).



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## Antibiotic resistance

“It is important that the public is aware that globally we are running out of effective antibiotics. They should only be used for bacterial infections that the body’s own immune response cannot fight, and only when a doctor prescribes them.

“Common colds and flus are, for example, caused by viruses, not bacteria, meaning that antibiotic therapy would be ineffective to treat these infections. Not only that, by using antibiotic treatment unnecessarily, other bacteria in the environment as well as the ‘healthy’ bacteria in the body gets the opportunity to develop resistance due to exposure, which can potentially cause antibiotic resistant infections later on,” says Dr Paul Soko executive head of clinical services and quality at Life Healthcare Group

Antibiotic-resistant infections are complex and difficult to treat. Therefore, left over antibiotics should not be shared between family and friends or using left over antibiotics from a previous illness. Antibiotics should only be used according to the advice provided by a healthcare professional. Unused medicines should always be returned to any local pharmacy for safe

destruction.

“The need for antibiotic use can further be reduced by ensuring that all vaccinations are up to date. Vaccine preventable diseases often lead to secondary bacterial infections necessitating the use antibiotics, which could have been prevented if vaccines were up to date,” he adds

### **Guidelines**

- Only use antibiotics when prescribed by a medical doctor
- Never demand antibiotics if your doctor says you don't need them
- Always follow your healthcare professional's advice when using antibiotics
- Never share or use leftover antibiotics
- Prevent infections by regularly washing your hands, preparing food hygienically, avoiding close contact with sick people, practicing safer sex, covering your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing and keeping vaccinations up to date

## **Antimicrobial Stewardship (AMS) Programme**

Life Healthcare has been active in Antimicrobial Stewardship (AMS) for a number of years. The programme drives the responsible use of antimicrobials, and is aligned to the National Department of Health's (DoH) AMR National Strategy Framework 2014-2024 in response to the World Health Assembly's endorsement of a global action plan to tackle antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

“In addition to the AMS Programme, stringent infection prevention and control programmes are also in place to assist in the effective management of AMR,” explains Soko.

The collaborative effort between doctors, pharmacists, microbiologists, infection prevention specialists, nurses and other healthcare professionals plays a critical role in driving and influencing the implementation of the hospital antimicrobial resistance strategy. The provision of patient information and counselling in terms of safe antimicrobial use and the risks of antimicrobial resistance is important to keep our patients safe and informed.

“We are all responsible for preserving the effectiveness of the only effective antibiotics we have left, whether we prescribe, dispense, provide advice or need to take them,” concludes Soko.

***World Antibiotic Awareness Week runs from 13-19 November 2017***

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