



Juncker's Commission accused of negligent response to biggest health threat of the 21st century

England's Chief Medical Officer and WHO director demand quick EU action to stop the spread of drug-resistant 'superbugs' and preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics

Brussels, 09/09/2016. The European Commission has been called on by Professor Dame Sally Davies, Chief Medical Officer for England and Dr Marc Sprenger, the Director of WHO's Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Secretariat to respond without delay to the threat of a post-antibiotic era.

Their calls were echoed by the public health community, consumer and environmental groups, representatives of the pharmaceutical industry and health professionals including infection control specialists, nurses and pharmacists, at a conference titled *RESISTANCE!, Antibiotics, politics and public health* hosted by the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA). Archie Turnbull, EPHA President, defined antimicrobial resistance as "the biggest health threat of the 21st century".

2016 is a crucial year in the fight against drug-resistance in bacteria, following the release of the AMR Review by Lord Jim O'Neill for the UK Prime Minister and European Council Conclusions under the Dutch Presidency and discussions at the recent G20 forum in China. AMR will be the topic of a Heads of State and Government meeting on 21st September convened by the UN Secretary-General in New York.

However, the European Commission's own AMR action plan is due to expire in 2 months and was branded by Commission Director-General for Health Xavier Prats-Monné as "not commensurate with the scale of the problem" at the conference.

The Commission's political will does not match DG Sante's prioritisation of AMR, implied Xavier Prats-Monné. EU Health Commissioner Dr Vytenis Andriukaitis calls AMR a major priority. Prats-Monné explained that lack of commitment outside his DG is the main obstacle to an action plan on AMR for 2017, which "could be presented shortly".

"I cannot believe there would not be a new European action plan" declared Prof Dame Sally C. Davies, "Europe must continue to be the leading world region in the fight against AMR. We need a new European action plan, and I encourage all stakeholders to cooperate and push for it." "Europe must set concrete targets now" echoed Dr Marc Sprenger, Director, Antimicrobial Resistance Secretariat, WHO.

In her closing conclusions of the conference, EPHA Secretary-General Nina Renshaw summed up the participants' call for the Juncker Commission to convert the current momentum, awareness and consensus into commitments and action, including mandatory targets for the prudent use of antibiotics, an increase of European funding and a beefed up mandate and resources for the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and called for Europe to go on a diplomatic offensive, undertaking AMR diplomacy towards G20, G7 and the UN.

####

Press Contact

Nina Renshaw, Secretary General, EPHA | nina@epha.org - +32 02 2333888
Sascha Marschang, Policy Manager, EPHA | sascha@epha.org - +32 02 2333883

The **European Public Health Alliance** (EPHA) is a change agent – Europe's leading NGO advocating for better health. We are a dynamic member-led organisation, made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe. EPHA is a member of, among others, the Social Platform, the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), the EU Civil Society Contact Group and the Better Regulation Watchdog.



NOTES

EPHA Annual Conference website:

<http://epha.org/our-annual-conference/>

Conference recap – Storify:

https://storify.com/EPHA_EU/epha-7th-annual-conference

WHAT IS AMR?

Growing drug resistance is one of the gravest threats to human health this century. According to the AMR Review, an independent body commissioned by the UK Prime Minister in collaboration with the Wellcome Trust, global deaths as a result of drug-resistant infections are projected to reach 10 million per year by 2050, with cumulative economic losses of \$100 trillion. Medical experts warn that in the near future, common illnesses, minor surgery, and routine operations such as hip replacements could become high risk procedures.

What is antimicrobial resistance?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) Antimicrobial resistance occurs when the microorganisms which cause certain diseases in humans and animals no longer react to previously effective drugs. Standard treatments become ineffective and the risk of the spread of infection to others increases.

Why does it occur?

It is normal for microorganisms to mutate and develop resistant strains – however, overconsumption and over-prescription, poor infection control practices, unsanitary living conditions, unsustainable farming practices and unchecked discharges in drug manufacturing of antimicrobials have all led to an increase in the number and types of resistant organisms. At the same time, it is harder to discover new drugs, while investment in research and development into new treatments by both the public and private sectors have significantly declined.

Who is affected?

It is estimated that 25,000 people die in Europe each year from drug-resistance to bacterial infections or tuberculosis. This will grow to 10 million people worldwide by 2050. As antibiotics in particular lose their effectiveness, common medical procedures (such as gut surgery, caesarean sections, joint replacements, and treatments that depress the immune system, such as chemotherapy for cancer) could become too dangerous to perform. Infectious diseases do not respond to normal treatments, increasing the risk of the spread of infection to others, and greater risk of death. There is also an economic cost – from longer hospital stays and more expensive drug therapies, putting increasing pressure on already over-strained public health systems, as well as lost production.

What is the evidence the situation is getting worse?

- Drug-resistant tuberculosis has been identified in 100 countries in all regions of the world
- Levels of pre-treatment HIV drug-resistance have reached 22% in some areas
- Gonorrhoea is now untreatable in several countries, following the failure of the strongest drug available



NOTE TO EDITORS

- Resistance to the treatment of last resort for life-threatening infections caused by common intestinal bacteria has spread to all regions of the world
- Doctors are now using antibiotics that were once avoided due to their side effects eg colistin for kidney infections as no other option is available

What is being done?

Despite rising awareness and concern, and a flurry of reports at international (e.g. WHO, G7, European Commission, ECDC), national (e.g. the UK AMR Review, national action plans) and sub-national level, there is a marked absence of concrete solutions and commitments to tackle the crisis. The European Public Health Alliance believes the AMR crisis is a test case for the EU' ability to protect public health and is calling for strong political leadership, coupled with clear strategic action, including appropriate goals, targets and sanctions from the EU to tackle this public health emergency.