

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Conference outlines a global plan to use old antibiotics to tackle multi-drug resistant ‘Superbugs’ and confront the imminent threat of a ‘post-antibiotic age’ which could see millions die from once commonplace, treatable infections

Vienna, October 27: Delegates at a major international conference held in Vienna last week and convened by the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID), have identified and agreed a number of key actions which need to be taken urgently, if old, off patent antibiotics are to be usefully and safely drafted into the battle to combat increasing levels of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) by ‘superbugs’ which are a growing threat to life across the world.

In the past two decades AMR has emerged as one of the greatest threats to public health. Authorities such as WHO, CDC, ECDC, EMA, FDA, EFSA and many more have issued warnings that without immediate action the world is heading towards a post-antibiotic age, where minor skin wounds and simple infections could become increasingly fatal to humans.

Almost 300 researchers, academics and representatives from pharmaceutical companies and national medical agencies convened in Vienna for the three day conference entitled ‘Reviving Old Antibiotics’. They reviewed the increasing threat of AMR, and explored the potential benefits and disadvantages of using old, off-patent antibiotics that may still be effective against some pathogens resistant to more modern treatments, with a view to creating an action plan for taking this initiative forward .

“We had a very fruitful and productive conference,” said Dr Ursula Theuretzbacher, founder of the Center of Anti-Infective Agents, Vienna, Austria, and Chair of the Scientific Programme Committee of this conference.

“It was the first of its kind to focus on the revival of old antibiotics as a viable tactic in confronting the threat of increasing AMR. We have known for some time that old generations of antibiotics, developed as long as 55 years ago, can be effective in certain clinical situations where multi-drug resistance has been found.”

“These old drugs were not developed, however, according to current exacting standards of science, research and practice. Without a solid strategy to re-develop these old drugs and rigorously test them according to today’s standards, we risk doing harm to patients or increasing multi-drug resistance even further. There’s a pressing need to incorporate our new modern scientific knowledge into regulatory frameworks and practice that will make these old antibiotics properly effective as an interim measure, pending development of a whole new generation of drugs to tackle AMR. This conference aimed to create a roadmap for taking old antibiotics forward and putting them to work again, safely and effectively.”

Over the course of the three-day conference delegates worked together to identify gaps in knowledge; reviewed ethical issues such as the problems of using antibiotic therapies on individual patients versus responsibility for the welfare of future society; clinical study issues; access to antibiotics in the developing world; availability and stewardship of old antibiotics; and the impact of AMR on public health.

Based on these discussions, conference delegates agreed a set of priorities for action:

- To identify and gain consensus on candidates amongst old generations of antibiotics that are most needed to fight multi-drug resistant infections
- For candidate antibiotics, to establish current quantities, global availability and dispersal, quality, appropriateness for human and non-human use, and to carry out the necessary studies to fill the knowledge gaps
- To engage in a co-ordinated effort to disseminate and communicate to all stakeholders – including governments, donors, academics, researchers, health professionals and the pharmaceutical industry - to build support and gain consensus on the need for rapid action on exploring the benefits of using off-patent antibiotics to tackle AMR.

“This was an extremely timely conference,” said Professor Gunnar Kahlmeter, ESCMID Communications Officer and Past President, “and it has been invaluable in terms of coalescing current thinking and understanding of the role that off-patent medicines can have in confronting AMR, which – without one shred of overstatement or hysteria – truly does threaten health care as we know it today.”

“The challenge now is to find much needed resources – time, finances, people – to fast track everything that needs to be done in terms of bringing these potentially life-saving drugs from research bench to bedside in record time.”

A full report from the conference, with recommendations and a plan of action, will be published shortly.

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