In the news

ENTERING A POST-ANTIBIOTIC ERA?

Although microbiologists have been ringing the alarm bell for years, the threat of antibiotic resistance recently reached new prominence in the popular press following a declaration by Britain's chief medical officer, Sally Davies, that the issue should be added to the list of national emergencies.

In her speech to members of parliament on the UK Commons Science and Technology Committee, Davies described the issue as an “apocalyptic scenario” and stated that “There are few public health issues of potentially greater importance for society than antibiotic resistance” (*The Guardian*, 23 Jan 2012).

During her address, she noted that about 80% of gonorrhoeal infections are now resistant to antibiotics and that there are around 440,000 new cases of drug-resistant tuberculosis annually. She also added that “we are not using our antibiotics effectively” and told the committee that “We need to get our act together in this country” (*International Business Times UK*, 24 Jan 2013). The speech comes ahead of the publication of the annual report on infectious diseases, which she said would include “a new cross-government strategy and action plan to tackle this issue” (*The Guardian*, 23 Jan 2013).

The antibiotic resistance problem is not new; however, as Valerie Edwards-Jones from Manchester Metropolitan University explains, “Since 2009, only two new drugs have been released” (*The Telegraph*, 27 Jan 2013). Margaret Chan, Director-General of the WHO, stated: “In terms of new replacement antibiotics, the pipeline is virtually dry, especially for Gram-negative bacteria.” She warns that we are fast approaching a post-antibiotic era and “an end to modern medicine”, when “Things as common as a strep throat or a child's scratched knee could once again kill” (*International Business Times UK*, 24 Jan 2013).

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