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Australia needs a National Coordinating Centre on Antimicrobial Resistance

Background

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a growing problem globally and untreatable infections due to resistant organisms are becoming increasingly common. The problem is driven by several factors, including antibiotic overuse in both human and animal health and in food production, deficiencies in infection control in hospitals, and importation of pathogens by travellers and in food imports. The UK government, US CDC, and World Health Organization (WHO) have all named AMR as a key issue of emerging concern, declaring it a global health and security issue. Australia's National Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy was introduced in 2015, with a second strategy under development

Current problem

Although Australia has implemented some elements of an appropriate AMR response (e.g. Australia has a national strategy, a partial surveillance system and a potentially strong laboratory network), national initiatives to promote key interventions are limited and there is a major lack of co-ordination and adequate funding. For example, there has been no formal engagement with the health and agriculture departments in the States and Territories even though they have a major role in a number of human and animal health sectors. Further, a number of key organisations involved in AMR operate independently and often make decisions which are not in the interests of the system as whole. While Australia currently has many existing entities that are important for controlling AMR, they are poorly coordinated by the current structure and approach. Despite some good intentions, Australia is now well behind most other developed countries in responding effectively to AMR. It may have the right policies but it lacks the co-ordination and resources to develop effective interventions. Australia is in the top 10% for per-capita antibiotic consumption in the world, and the eighth highest user of antibiotics compared to the 28 European countries (e.g. almost one in two Australians is prescribed at least one course of antibiotics on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme each year).

Proposed Solution - Establishing a National Centre

In June 2017, the Australian Society for Antimicrobials (ASA) and the Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases (ASID), in partnership with Australasian College of Infection Prevention and Control (ACIPC), hosted the second National Antimicrobial Resistance Summit. Key representatives and stakeholders from state and federal government, research, human healthcare, veterinary and agricultural sectors discussed the way forward to improve the response to antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in Australia. The key recommendation arising from this was that Australia should, as a priority, develop a central cross-jurisdictional mechanism to coordinate and manage national AMR control activities. We recommend the establishment of a new Australian National Coordinating Centre on Antimicrobial Resistance which is responsible for effective coordination of current and future AMR efforts in human and animal health and agriculture.

The key features of the Coordinating Centre should be to:

- Co-ordinate national activities to drive effective interventions to control and reduce AMR, while linking with effective surveillance. This should be modelled on other successful national programs such as *Hand Hygiene Australia* and *OzFoodNet*. Since some of the components for effective action are already present, the Coordinating Centre could be structured as a central “umbrella” coordinating agency with a small physical footprint and key focus on facilitating interventions, communication and support across all jurisdictions. The Coordinating Centre should take responsibility for existing surveillance programs (e.g. AURA) and interventions (eg. National Hand Hygiene Initiative) and link these with new interventions.
- Expand the scope of existing surveillance and laboratory activities in human health and, through engagement with experts in the area, expand surveillance efforts in animal health and agriculture to allow improved integration.
- Focus on practical intervention and implementation activities that will minimise unnecessary antimicrobial use and reduce the emergence and spread of AMR in Australia, with the key metric being improved health outcomes
- Support training and education to reduce infections, facilitate research and innovation to find practical solutions to this issue, and advocate for evidence-based policies to protect Australians. It would also support regional efforts to reduce antibiotic resistance in our near neighbours.

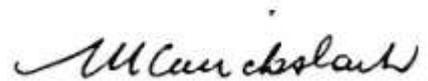
The key metric of success for the Coordinating Centre should be the control and reduction of drug-resistant infections in human and animal health.



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