



Neglected tropical diseases and One Health

Gearing up against antimicrobial resistance
to secure the safety of future generations

Meeting report, 24 November 2020

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1. Introduction

A WHO webinar on neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and antimicrobial resistance was held virtually on 24 November 2020 as part of World Antimicrobial Awareness Week. The agenda is annexed to this report.

World Antimicrobial Awareness Week aims to increase awareness of global antimicrobial resistance and encourage best practices among the general public, health workers and policy-makers to avoid the further emergence and spread of drug-resistant infections. A global action plan to tackle the growing problem of resistance to antibiotics and other antimicrobial medicines was endorsed by the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly in May 2015. One of its key objectives is to improve awareness and understanding of antimicrobial resistance through effective communication, education and training. World Antimicrobial Awareness Week is observed annually from 18 to 24 November.

Participants were welcomed to the meeting by representatives of the WHO Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases and reminded of the meeting's full title, "Neglected tropical diseases and One Health: gearing up against antimicrobial resistance to secure the safety of future generations". It was further noted that the discussion was taking place as the world observes Antimicrobial Awareness Week (18–24 November 2020).

Most NTD programmes depend on several medicines to scale up interventions for the control, elimination and eradication of these diseases. As such, it is critical and was agreed to take part actively in the movement to preserve antimicrobial medicines. The theme of this year's campaign – *United to preserve antimicrobials* – is well aligned with the identification of antimicrobial resistance in the NTD road map for 2021–2030 as one of the risks that requires close monitoring in both humans and animals to reduce the potential negative impact on limited NTD therapeutic arsenals.

Antimicrobials are part of the arsenal that the NTD community has at its disposal to save lives and are critical in many ways to treat both common and more serious infections. Whenever antimicrobials are used, however, they have the potential to cause side-effects and contribute to various types of resistance; this constitutes today a potential threat to public health.

Participants heard that the wider Antimicrobial Awareness Week would include wide-ranging discussions to raise awareness about antimicrobial resistance, how and when antimicrobials should be taken, how populations can remain healthy, and how the fight against resistance can ensure these treatments remain available for future generations.

For NTDs specifically, the potential emergence of drug resistance is real: many programmes depend heavily on antimicrobials for preventive and curative chemotherapy. Widespread resistance to currently used medicines has the potential, therefore, to jeopardize entire interventions and put at risk global programmes that currently treat millions of marginalized populations.

The aim of the webinar was to increase awareness of global antimicrobial resistance, to explore related issues and to encourage best practices among stakeholders and policy-makers to avoid the emergence and spread of drug-resistant infections in general and for NTDs in particular.

The webinar featured simultaneous interpretation in English, French and Spanish. Participants were invited to ask questions during the proceedings via the Slido application. The meeting was held online via Zoom and was also streamed live on YouTube.

The webinar was moderated by Professor Santiago Mas-Coma, with contributions from Professor Emmanuel Cambau, Professor Bruno Levecke, Professor Shyam Sundar, Dr Oriel Mitjà, Dr Catherine Oldenburg, Dr Daniel Argaw Dagne and Professor Mas-Coma himself.

2. Antimicrobial resistance in the context of NTDs

The first presentation was made by Dr Haileyesus Getahun, Director, WHO Global Coordination and Partnership department for Antimicrobial Resistance, and addressed antimicrobial resistance in the context of NTDs starting with a wide-ranging overview of the field.

Antimicrobial resistance is a complex issue involving humans, animals, plants, food chains and the environment as a whole. The critical issue, Dr Getahun noted, is that antimicrobials are shared between all these spheres. The challenge, therefore, ranges from underuse and misuse to overuse of antimicrobials, with the potential to negatively affect human, animal and plant safety, food security and global health security. That is why WHO has taken steps in the past 2 years and established a new division led by an Assistant Director-General to boost its leadership in coordinating the global response and the tripartite (WHO/FAO/OIE) joint action on antimicrobial resistance.

That response includes supporting and coordinating the delivery of World Antibiotic Awareness Week. This year, Dr Getahun noted, the Week has been expanded to include antivirals, antifungals and anti-parasitics in addition to antibiotics. It will be called World Antimicrobial Awareness Week from 2020 onwards and its dates are now fixed from 18 to 24 November every year. The fundamental issue is that drug resistance is not limited to antibiotics: a collective response is paramount to address problems that have the potential to intersect multiple fields. Dr Getahun noted that the strong commitment of the NTD community, as evidenced by the representation at the webinar, signalled that difficult issues were not being avoided and that they might best be addressed collectively.

Synergy and efficient interaction between the different publics and programmes would be vital to ensure that antimicrobials are properly addressed by the NTD community in general and by individual programmes more specifically, in order to safeguard past gains and ensure that effective treatments continue to be administered in the future..

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