

IRRATIONAL USE OF ANTIBIOTICS DURING COVID-19

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Letter to the
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Dear Editor,

Antimicrobial resistance is generally described as the “silent pandemic” and during COVID-19 it starts accelerating never than before. Excessive use of the world’s most potent antibiotics has stoked drug-resistant infections in India for years. Now the country’s COVID crisis has put the calamity into hyper drive mode.

The havoc caused by COVID -19 in India has reached more than 30 million people infected with the virus and nearly 405,000 deaths, though some experts are concerned that the numbers are likely to be higher. [1]

During India’s first surge of COVID-19, antibiotic sales soared, suggesting that the drugs were used to treat mild and moderate cases of COVID-19, according to research led by Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. Such use is considered inappropriate because antibiotics are only effective against bacterial infections, not viral infections such as COVID-19, and overuse increases the risk for drug-resistant infections. [2]

“Antibiotic resistance is one of the greatest threats to global public health. Overuse of antibiotics lessens their ability to effectively treat minor injuries and common infections such as pneumonia, which means that these conditions can become serious and deadly. Bacteria that have become resistant to antibiotics don’t have boundaries. They can spread to any person in any country.”[2]

The researchers determined that a total of 16,290 million doses of antibiotics were sold

in India in 2020, which is slightly less than the amounts sold in 2018 and in 2019. However, when researchers focused on adult doses, usage increased from 72.6% in 2018 and 72.5% in 2019 to 76.8% in 2020. [3]

Additionally, sales of azithromycin for adults in India increased from 4% in 2018 and 4.5% in 2019 to 5.9% in 2020. The study also showed notable increases in the sales of doxycycline and faropenem, these two antibiotics commonly used to treat respiratory infections. [3]

And in the interim, self-medication has increased exponentially in COVID-19. Self-medication and medication by non-practitioner is common practice in many underdeveloped or developing countries as it provides a low-cost alternative for people, which involves inappropriate and injudicious use of medicines treat self-recognized symptoms by the people. Some studies revealed the causes of self-medication as news of spread, effects and remedies in media channels, internet; mental stress of lockdown and isolation, insecurity and panic about scarcity of drug and healthcare support. It develops antibiotic resistance. [4] [5] [6]

During the second wave of COVID-19 in India preliminary research shows a similar reliance on using antibiotics to treat mild and moderate cases which might have long-term consequences on bacterial resistance pattern. An urgent need of antibiotic stewardship measures is required to be implemented nationwide, including mass vaccination.

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