

Novartis moves to address superbug threat

Novartis and other industry leaders call for action to address antimicrobial resistance, one of the world's most serious public health challenges

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Drug-resistant bacteria can have a devastating impact on patients. Every year in the US at least 2 million people become infected with bacteria that do not respond to current antibiotic therapies, leading directly to 23,000 deaths. Independent analysis estimates the global death toll at about 700,000 a year globally, a figure that could reach 10 million a year by 2050¹ if the discovery of new therapies fails to keep pace with the rise of drug-resistant 'superbugs'.

Novartis has joined with more than 80 leading international pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies to call for a global, united front with governments against the emergence of drug-resistant infections.

The declaration calls for better education on the appropriate use of antibiotics to reduce unnecessary prescriptions by clinicians and overuse by patients and in livestock; improved access to high-quality antibiotics for all; and increased investment in the research and development of new antimicrobial treatments. It also urges governments to support research efforts by committing to funding and improving incentives for new medicines.

Novartis has not only a long history in developing antibiotic treatments to fight bacterial infection. The company's generic medicines division, Sandoz is also the world's largest generic antimicrobial producer. About 66 million patients take Novartis medicines to tackle bacterial infection every year and the company is working to broaden access to these treatments in under-served markets around the world.

High-quality generic anti-infective medicines are a key part of the provision of global healthcare, underpinning most common surgical procedures and treatments such as chemotherapy as well as treating acute bacterial infections. More than 70% of anti-infectives sold globally are generic medicines.

Sandoz works to ensure responsible use of antibiotics. In 2015 it spearheaded a successful multimedia campaign in part of Latin America to educate healthcare professionals about appropriate use. The campaign reached 21,000 physicians and 35,000 pharmacists, primarily in Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador and Colombia.

Novartis continues to conduct research into new antibiotic treatments for the most devastating infectious diseases. Its approach is two-fold. Firstly, the company is optimizing known classes of antibiotics to be more effective and, secondly, researchers are working to develop a new generation of antimicrobials that can combat superbugs. It is a demanding scientific priority as these superbugs have evolved over many years to effectively withstand current treatments and a better understanding of how to circumvent their defenses is needed.

"Infectious diseases will never be eradicated because bacteria will continue to evolve in response to treatment," said Don Ganem, head of the Novartis Infectious Diseases unit. "The goal is to manage, rather than eliminate the problem. We need to develop new antibiotics that stay ahead of mutational drug resistance. We are committed to our work in this challenging area of science."

1. Review on Antimicrobial Resistance: [Tackling drug-resistant infections globally](#)

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