

Antibiotics Should Be Assigned to a Special Drug Class to Preserve Their Power, Says Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics

Each antibiotic use impacts the larger community, says APUA President Stuart Levy

ATLANTA – July 13, 2010 – To preserve their power to treat infections, antibiotics should be assigned to a special drug class, Stuart B. Levy, president of the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (APUA), the leading, independent global organization dedicated to preserving the power of antibiotics, told a gathering of scientists meeting today at the International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases.

Levy, an internationally recognized authority and professor of molecular biology and microbiology and of medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine, suggested that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) classify antibiotics as “societal drugs” and impose stricter access to them, as it does with narcotics and psychoactive drugs.

“Antibiotics are different from all other drugs,” Levy said. “Unlike, for example, drugs administered for heart disease, which affect the treated person and has no impact on anyone else, antibiotics affect the treated individuals, others sharing the environment, as well as the larger community.”

According to Levy, antibiotics affect society at large by giving a survival advantage to drug resistant organisms, which then spread to others. He cited a British study which found that if one person was taking an antibiotic for acne, others residing in the same home had 1000 times more multi-drug resistant bacteria on their skin than did members of a household without antibiotic use.

“We need to recognize the special nature of antibiotics and for that reason grant them a unique classification among prescription drugs,” Levy said. “As life-saving societal resources, they should be allotted a status apart from drugs that affect individuals alone. That special status would also include special guidelines to promote more prudent use of antibiotics by practitioners and patients.”

As antibiotic misuse and overuse increases—including in animal food production and consumer products—bacteria respond by developing resistance to them. Today, more than 60% of staph infections are drug resistant, according to APUA, including those affecting various areas and organs of the body such as the skin, lungs, urinary, and intestinal tracts. Many are also becoming resistant to various types of antibiotics.

Antibiotic resistance is costly to fight. According to a recent study sponsored by APUA, the estimated annual cost of antibiotic resistance in U.S. hospitals is more than \$20 billion and adds 6.4 – 12.7 hospital days per patient stay.

“Currently, the pipeline for new antibiotics is lean, in part because large pharmaceutical companies have focused their efforts on developing drugs to treat chronic illnesses since those drugs are more lucrative,” Levy said.

In assigning antibiotics to a new class of drugs, he said, the FDA could offer incentives for pharmaceutical firms to more aggressively discover and develop new antibiotics.

About APUA

APUA, the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (www.apua.org), founded in 1981 and based at Tufts University in Boston, Mass., is the leading, independent non-governmental organization dedicated to preserving the power of existing antibiotics and increasing access to needed new agents. APUA conducts a multidisciplinary research program to provide evidence to inform and shape public policy. With chapters in 60 countries, APUA works to improve the use of antibiotics worldwide to preserve their ability to cure infections.

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