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WORLD ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE AWARENESS WEEK 2024: A NOTE TO STAKEHOLDERS IN HEALTH

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KEYWORDS

Stakeholders in health, Antimicrobial Resistance, Infection Prevention and Control, Sustainable Development Goals, Antimicrobial Stewardship.

World Antimicrobial Resistance Awareness week (WAAW) is a week-long annual event taking place between 18 to 24 November to create (more) awareness on antimicrobial resistance (AMR). This year's 2024 event has come and gone with the theme: 'Educate (stakeholders on AMR), advocate (for bold commitments) and act now (take concrete actions in response to AMR)'.

Infection prevention and control and antimicrobial stewardship (IPAC & AMS) committees of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Teaching Hospital (ATBUTH), Bauchi organized a seminar on 21st of November, 2024 at the teaching hospital's multipurpose hall to commemorate this year's event with a special host to a radio program in Bauchi. The lessons learned shouldn't be forgotten, this informed the decision of members of IPAC &

AMS to put it in black and white to serve as quick reminder for the stakeholders in health. It becomes necessary because the misuse of antimicrobials has reached alarming levels, with devastating consequences, including the rise of antimicrobial resistance. Shockingly, around 66% of oral antibiotics are consumed without a prescription, highlighting the urgent need for responsible antimicrobial stewardship (AMS).¹

Antimicrobial resistance occurs when pathogenic agents like bacteria, viruses, fungi, or parasites develop mechanisms to resist the effect of antimicrobial drugs making the drugs less effective or ineffective in treating infections.² This happens when microorganisms evolve and become resistant to medications, rendering them ineffective against infections. AMR is a stealthy but deadly threat, recognized globally as a top-ten health risk that demands urgent attention; it is a threat to control of emerging and reemerging infections contributing to approximately 5 million deaths all over the world.^{2,3} It threatens the successful achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as people living in poverty are facing heavy burden of infectious diseases and having to deal with the economic impact of infections that are resistant to treatment.⁴

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To combat this problem, the stakeholders especially, the patients and their families, the governments and policy makers and healthcare providers should respond promptly. The patients and their families should avoid self-medication; not all illnesses require antibiotics or antimalarial, they should be attentive to dose and dosage and the issues of personal and environmental hygiene especially hand washing should be taken seriously. The governments and policy makers should increase budget allocation to health to at least 15% WHO recommendation and build more infrastructures to carry out research and develop new drugs (antimicrobials). They should also enact and enforce policies and laws that will reduce antimicrobial misuse in the hospital and society at large.⁵ They should make provisions for clean water as well as affordable and clean energy to drive the machines that pump the water.⁵

Healthcare providers and their managers should strengthen Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) measures as it is a vital approach to mitigating the emergence and transmission of AMR. Implementation of IPAC measures should therefore be prioritized and funded.⁵ A necessary support should be provided for AMS in the hospitals. Irrational prescription is a form of antimicrobial misuse that facilitates AMR, it should be avoided. Antimicrobial sensitivity test (AST) should be ensured before prescriptions and adopting standard precaution in managing all patients should become a common practice by all healthcare providers.⁵ Other stakeholders like the healthcare organizations, pharmaceutical and medical device companies, healthcare advocacy group, researchers and academics should queue behind the earlier mentioned stakeholders to support achieving reduction in AMR.

Time is now for stakeholders in health to reflect on the theme of this year's event and act now with a bid to reduce or stop antimicrobial resistance. This can be achieved by strengthening IPAC and AMS, building infrastructure and utilizing innovations in technological advancement such as genomics and bioinformatics.

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