Antimicrobial Resistance: A growing threat in the EMR

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is emerging as a major global health security concern. Despite the availability of non representative and comparable data across countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) of WHO, findings of a number of studies commissioned recently show a grave picture of the AMR situation in the Region.

Estimates on the magnitude and health and socio-economic burden of the problem associated with AMR in the Region are hampered by the limited availability of reliable data. However, academic studies from some countries in the Region show that the antimicrobial resistance pattern is critical and geographically extensive, with methicillin resistance rates in Staphylococcus aureus exceeding 50% in several countries and resistance to third generation cephalosporins in Escherichia coli exceeding 60% in some, among others (Please see above).

The resistance information from specific programs (such as tuberculosis (TB), HIV and malaria) are more advanced. Approximately 24,000 new cases of multidrug resistant tuberculosis occur each year in the Region. There are alarming signs of increased transmitted HIV drug resistance. Falciparum malaria parasites resistant to last resort drug-artemisinins, are emerging resulting in higher morbidity and mortality. Resistance to earlier generation antimalarial medicines, such as chloroquine and sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine, is also widespread in most malaria-endemic countries in the Region. Increasing levels of AMR prevalence is endangering the prevention and treatment of infections ranging from the common up to life-threatening ones, which disproportionally affect the poor. This in turn imposes significant burden on health systems and beyond.

The fast growing AMR is undermining the achievements of public health and medicine by taking back to the pre-antibiotic era where there was no cure for community acquired infections. It is a multifaceted problem and requires an urgent action today. Appropriate actions to combat the threat of AMR will rely on three strategic pillars: i) Raising awareness amongst public and health professionals ii) Establish national multi-sectorial coordination mechanisms iii) Set up national AMR surveillance system through early implementation of the Global Anti-microbial Surveillance System (GLASS) iv) Improve antibiotic stewardship for rational use of antibiotics v) Enhance infection control programme specially in healthcare settings.

Important actions to curb the threats of AMR

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