

Antibiotic abuse and its dreadful outcome

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Online Desk: That antibiotics are increasingly becoming ineffective against bacterial infection is now a global problem. Widespread abuse has resulted in the emergence of superbugs that are found immune to all sorts of anti-microbial drugs. The situation in Bangladesh is particularly worrying because of the unpardonable apathy of physicians, health sector policymakers and people to drug resistance. One of the competent authorities in this field – the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) – has also corroborated it. The institute last week unveiled a survey report showing that the number of multi-drug-resistant bacteria has been increasing unabatedly in the country.

Health sector researchers in developed countries have been burning the midnight oil to find a solution to the problem that has been intensifying over the years. Physicians in those countries hardly prescribe antibiotics without being certain of the underlying causes of a disease. None can also buy antibiotics without a prescription from pharmacies. If drug-resistant bacteria remain a problem in countries having the most modern treatment and medical research facilities, one can well imagine the situation in a country like Bangladesh. Many doctors do not feel the need for diagnostic tests before prescribing antibiotics. Some physicians even prescribe all the anti-microbial drugs – antibiotics, antiprotozoal and anti-viral – with the hope that one of the three would surely be effective. They tend to be guided by their assumptions, not diagnostic results. Such an attitude better suits quacks, not qualified doctors. Not many people are aware of the frightening statistics: globally one person dies every 45 seconds for antibiotic resistance and by 2050, one person is likely to expire every three seconds for the same reason.

What is worse for Bangladesh is the availability of antibiotics without prescriptions from registered physicians. One can walk into a drug store and buy the antibiotics or any other medicine without prescriptions although the containers of drugs carry the advice ‘to be dispensed only by or on the prescription of a registered physician’. Such indiscriminate sales and use of antibiotics have given rise to multi-drug resistance bacteria. The NIPSOM survey carried out in different hospitals in 2023 found 81 per cent of bacteria with multi-drug resistance properties. The rate was 71 per cent in 2017. Besides, the efficacy of antibiotics on hospital patients was found between 40-60 per cent. Even the effectiveness of the widely used antibiotic, according to the survey results, was below 50 per cent.

If the current trends in antibiotic sales and usage persist, the future for the human race appears bleak, particularly for people in Bangladesh where healthcare services are deficient and a vast majority of the population lacks access to modern treatment. Thus, it is high time the relevant authorities made the right move to create awareness among the mass people, physicians and drug store owners in particular against the abuse of antibiotics in the country. The Drug Administration (DA) deserves appreciation for showing an animated documentary on TV channels to make people aware of the abuse of antibiotics. Others involved in healthcare should also follow suit. However, the DA appears negligent in the matters of punishing the drugstores that sell non-OTC drugs without prescription. Such negligence does not complement the good works DA has been doing to raise awareness about antibiotic abuse.