

news release

NHS Scotland Reports on Fight Against Resistant Infections

NHS Health Protection Scotland (HPS), in collaboration with Information Services Division (ISD), has released today a first national report combining information on antimicrobial use and resistance, an important step in the continuing fight against infection.

The report released today ("Scottish Antimicrobial Prescribing Group (SAPG) Report on Antimicrobial Resistance and Use in Humans in 2008") shows that in 2008, the year this report covers, prescribing in general practice was already largely in line with guidance subsequently produced by SAPG in 2009, with eight of the ten most commonly used antimicrobials being those which SAPG recommends.

As well as a description of the use of antimicrobials and antibacterials in general practice, the report provides information on antimicrobial resistance in a key range of organisms associated with septicaemia (an infection of the blood stream). Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) refers to the ability of a bacterium to withstand an antibiotic used in treatment. AMR is recognised as a major threat to public health and patient safety, as it reduces the treatment options available to combat infections such as *Staphylococcus aureus*, the meticillin resistant strain of which is commonly known as MRSA. It is widely accepted that appropriate prescribing and use of antimicrobials and antibacterials can reduce the risk of AMR developing and therefore preserve the ability to use these drugs in the fight against infection.

The report shows that there is already some antimicrobial resistance present in bacteria other than MRSA, particularly *E.coli*, which is the most commonly reported cause of septicaemia. This finding confirms the need to act now with appropriate antimicrobial stewardship to prevent further spread of resistant organisms.

Dr Anne Eastaway, Consultant Microbiologist at HPS and programme lead for the national surveillance of AMR, said: "While resistance levels at present remain low and prescribing in general practice is largely in line with national guidance, we cannot be complacent about antimicrobial resistance and must continue to be vigilant in monitoring trends and identifying new resistant mechanisms, working with clinicians to ensure antimicrobials and antibacterials are used cautiously and appropriately."

Dr Dilip Nathwani, Chair of SAPG said: "On behalf of SAPG, I welcome this important report. The information within the report and planned future work is essential national intelligence to support existing local data. The combination of good national and local surveillance is key to the success of our national stewardship programme, which aims to improve the prescribing of antimicrobials and



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antibacterials and reduce harm from their inappropriate use in Scotland, both within hospitals and in the community.”

The report is intended to support the work of SAPG at a national level. SAPG is part of the Scottish Medicines Consortium and was set up to oversee a national antimicrobial stewardship programme, of which this report forms a part. It will also support the work of NHS boards, hospitals and primary care services in their long-term planning of antimicrobial and antibacterial prescribing and establish a baseline from which the impact of national and local initiatives to improve the quality of prescribing and contain the spread of resistance can be assessed in the future.

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Notes to the Editor

The report is available at
<http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/haic/amr/publicationsdetail.aspx?id=43744>.

In 2009, SAPG considered the need for guidance on antimicrobial prescribing in primary care and adopted the HPA template as a suitable framework for NHS boards. The HPA template is available at http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1194947340160. Further SAPG guidance on prescribing is available at <http://www.scottishmedicines.org.uk/smc/6627.221.286.html>.

Health Protection Scotland (HPS) and Information Services Division (ISD) are part of NHS National Services Scotland (NSS); a special health board providing services critical to frontline patient care and which is supportive of the efficient and effective operation of NHS Scotland.

SAPG is a national clinical multi-disciplinary forum formed in March 2008 by the Scottish Government Health Department (SGHD) with representation from key stakeholders including all mainland health boards. The forum is hosted by the Scottish Medicines Consortium and its primary objective is to co-ordinate and deliver a national framework for antimicrobial stewardship to enhance the quality of antimicrobial prescribing and management in Scotland.

The remit of the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) is to provide advice to NHS boards and their Area Drug and Therapeutics Committees (ADTCs) across Scotland about the status of all newly licensed medicines, all new formulations of existing medicines and new indications for established products (licensed from January 2002). The remit of the SMC was further expanded from April 2008 to include the work of the Scottish Antimicrobial Prescribing Group. This groups aims to co-ordinate and deliver a national framework for antimicrobial stewardship to enhance the quality of prescribing antimicrobials across all healthcare settings. This will primarily be achieved through improved systems and processes for collation, analysis, correlation and reporting of antimicrobial utilisation and resistance data and improved education programmes for healthcare professionals.

The information presented covers the period up to the end of 2008 and sets the baseline against which the emerging trends in antimicrobial use and resistance can be monitored. The report is intended to support NHS boards, hospitals and primary care in their long term planning of antimicrobial prescribing. In particular, this report should be of use to antimicrobial management teams (AMTs), infection control teams (ICTs) and microbiologists.

Further information

What are antibiotics, antimicrobials and antibacterials, and what are they used for?

Antimicrobials and antibacterials are both terms used to describe antibiotics, a group of drugs used to treat and prevent bacterial infections. Used appropriately, antibiotics are valuable and effective treatments and can combat bacteria which cause infections. When antibiotics are used inappropriately, bacteria can develop resistance to the antibiotic, meaning that the bacteria is not killed and infection can occur or continue. Use of the wrong antibiotic or combination of antibiotics can also affect the natural balance of the body, giving rise to opportunistic infections such as *Clostridium difficile*.

What would constitute inappropriate use and why is widespread inappropriate use a problem?

Inappropriate use might involve prescription of antibiotics unsuitable for the infection, or it may be that a patient does not finish their course of antibiotics, meaning that the bacteria are not all killed and can become resistant to the antibiotic which had been used. Where resistant strains develop and pass between people to become widespread, this lessens the treatment options available and can increase the burden of infection in the community.

What is being done in Scotland to ensure AMR doesn't mean we can't treat infections?

At a national level, SAPG is co-ordinating an antimicrobial stewardship programme which brings together national surveillance of antimicrobial prescribing and resistance (this report), guidance on management of infections and prescribing, education on the management of infections and infection control measures to contain spread. This supports work undertaken by antimicrobial management teams and infection control teams within NHS boards to guide antimicrobial prescribing and contain the spread of antimicrobial resistance.