Public health: combating antimicrobial resistance

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PURPOSE: To propose a Council Recommendation on a Community strategy against antimicrobial resistance. CONTENT: There is little doubt that the discovery of substances with antibacterial effects (antibiotics) has considerably reduced the morbidity rate whilst at the same time increased the life expectancy of individuals. Unfortunately however, conclusive scientific research shows that antimicrobial resistances has become a major public health problem, both within the Community and world-wide. In its Communication, the Commission defines the term "antimicrobial agent" as "a substance produced either synthetically or naturally by bacteria, fungae or plants, used to kill or inhibit the growth of micro-organisms, including bacteria, viruses and fungae and parasites exhibiting the phenomenon of resistance (in particular protozoa)". In view of the fact that bacteria and the like know no national boundaries a Community wide response is perceived as a more effective tool to fighting bacterial resistance to antibiotics than a national one. Accordingly, the Commission has prepared this Communication with a view to implementing Community wide action lines to help counter the effects of bacterial resistance. Based on advice from a number of scientific committees the Commission points out that prompt action is needed in the following areas: - prudent use of antimicrobial agents; - prevention of diseases; - development of new products; methods of treatment and monitoring of the situation. Bearing this in mind the Commission proposes a Community strategy based on four key areas of action, namely: 1) Surveillance: Monitoring the evolution and the effects of interventions through the establishment /strengthening of accurate surveillance systems on antimicrobial resistance in the human and veterinary sector and the consumption of antimicrobial agents. 2) Prevention of communicable diseases, and infection control to reduce the needs for antimicrobial agents. This includes the prudent use of antimicrobial agents which entails the need for improved product information for authorised antibacterial medicinal products and the promotion of educational and behavioural actions towards the professionals and the general public. 3) Research and product development: New modalities for prevention and treatment of infections and continued support of research for new drugs and alternatives. International co-operation: Antimicrobial resistance does not respect frontiers. An effective strategy requires close co-operation and consultation between the Commission, the Member States and other involved parties, especially at international level.