



Antibiotics

– Use Them Wisely

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A symposium titled, “Antibiotics – Use Them Wisely!” was held recently at the College of Medicine Building. Dr Chen Ai Ju, former Director of Medical Services, opened the symposium. The symposium was jointly organised by the Academy of Medicine, College of Family Physicians, Singapore Medical Association, Singapore Paediatrics Society, Society of Infectious Disease and the Ministry of Health. It was well attended by more than 300 doctors from the government and private sectors.

It is well accepted that inappropriate usage is the major factor in the development of antibiotic resistance. Therefore, the main strategy that should be employed to slow the march of antibiotic resistance is judicious use.

The symposium was held in conjunction with the release of Clinical Practice Guidelines on the use of antibiotics in adults. These guidelines were prepared by the Chapter of Physicians, Academy of Medicine, Singapore with major inputs from a workgroup comprising specialists in family medicine, infectious diseases, microbiology, respiratory medicine, renal medicine and geriatric medicine. Separate guidelines on the use of antibiotics in children are currently being developed.

The symposium was held against a backdrop of increasing reports of bacterial resistance to antibiotics in most, if not all countries, in the world. Dr Ling Moi Lin, consultant microbiologist in the Department of

Pathology, SGH presented facts and figures to show that there were already moderate to high levels of bacterial resistance to antibiotics in Singapore.

Dr Daniel Goh from the Department of Paediatrics, NUH discussed the issues of antibiotic use in Paediatric patients, reminding us that children are not just “little adults”. The majority of infections in children whether URTI or of infective gastroenteritis is viral in origin and do not require antibiotics.

At the opposite end of the age spectrum, the geriatric population has different factors that should be taken into consideration. Dr Pang Weng Sun from the Department of Geriatric Medicine, TTSH, made us aware that infections in the elderly may have atypical presentations which account for higher mortality. Pharmacokinetic changes with age and drug interactions should also be considered.

A/Prof Goh Lee Gan from the Department of Community, Occupational and Family Medicine, NUH talked about antibiotic use in Upper Respiratory Tract Infections stressing that most URTI's are caused by viruses, and discussed the use of a symptom score to help the doctor decide on antibiotic use.

Use of antibiotics in Lower Respiratory Tract Infections was presented by A/Prof Lim Tow Keang from the Department of Medicine, NUH. A/Prof Lim emphasised the need for the family physician to stratify patients into high and low risk groups in deciding on choice of antibiotics.

Dr Vathsala from the Department of Renal Medicine, SGH concluded the symposium with a talk on Upper and

Lower Urinary Tract Infections, in both males and females.

There was active participation from the audience in the Question and Answer sessions, with a few doctors expressing the need for more local community-based research so that we would know what our infectious disease spectra and antimicrobial susceptibilities are like.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH SURVEY

A survey was conducted in 1999 by MOH to study antibiotic prescribing practices among General Practitioners. The survey had some encouraging findings, e.g. short duration antibiotic prescriptions of 3 days or less fell from 36% of prescriptions in 1994 to 21% last year. However, the use of second-line broad-spectrum antibiotics rose from 7% in 1994 to 13% last year. More than 80% of these second-line antibiotics were prescribed from the outset of treatment. The survey also found that 61% of antibiotic prescriptions were given for upper respiratory tract infections for which antibiotics as we well know, are mostly ineffective. Antibiotics were also given for some cases of gastroenteritis.

There is a common perception that patients commonly ask to be treated with antibiotics. The MOH survey found that only 13% of patients asked for antibiotics. Nonetheless, doctors need to educate the public about the role of antibiotics, when it would be appropriate to use them and the importance of completing the courses prescribed. ■

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