
LETTER TO THE EDITOR

THE GROWING THREAT OF ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE IN AFRICA: AN URGENT CALL FOR ACTION

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Dear Editor,

The rise of superbugs presents a significant global health challenge for the 21st century [1]. The use of antimicrobial agents in animals poses a serious threat to global public health due to the emergence of resistant pathogens [2]. This rapid emergence is attributed to the inappropriate use (overuse, misuse, and abuse) of antimicrobial agents in humans and animals [1]. It is projected that by 2050, antimicrobial resistance could result in approximately 10 million deaths annually, with about half (4.15 million) of these deaths occurring in Africa [3]. This is in addition to the substantial economic losses in the livestock industry.

The 7th annual report by the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) on the use of antimicrobial agents in animals reveals a notable 13% global decrease in antimicrobial use in animals (which account for 65% of the global animal biomass) from 2017 to 2019. However, it's concerning that Africa experienced a 45% increase in antimicrobial use during the same period. This trend poses a significant threat to public health in Africa, particularly in the fight against superbugs. Another worrying finding was that, only 51% of WOA African members provided validated data on antimicrobial quantities intended for use in animals. Although 86% of the estimated data coverage was reported by 28 countries, only 24% of the member countries reported the use of antimicrobial agents as growth promoters [4]. The lack of comprehensive data suggests that the actual usage could be higher, highlighting the need for relevant authorities to enhance data collection efforts to bridge the information gap.

The utilization of antimicrobial agents as growth promoters has been a significant factor contributing to the emergence of resistant pathogens across the animal, human, and environmental sectors. It is encouraging to note that 27 out of 42 (65%) African WOA members do not employ antimicrobials as growth promoters, signaling a positive step in the right direction. However, further efforts are required to raise awareness among community and traditional leaders, livestock farmers, para-veterinarians, and veterinarians. Public media channels such as radio, TV, and print media can be effectively utilized to educate the public about the public health risks associated with the use of antimicrobial agents as growth promoters, highlight alternative methods to improve animal production without relying on antimicrobials, the concept of one health, and significance of adopting and adhering to antimicrobial resistance (AMR) stewardship programs. Mass communication has the potential to effectively increase awareness and impact behavioral change in low and middle-income countries. This is particularly significant as various factors associated with patients and the community play a crucial role in driving irrational antimicrobial use and drug resistance.

The threat posed by antimicrobial resistance (AMR) to public health in Africa cannot be overstated, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach and advocacy by all stakeholders (One Health approach) to address this issue.

Competing Interests

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