



PRESS RELEASE

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Life Healthcare supports responsible antibiotic use by patients and health professionals alike

In support of the World Health Organisation's Antibiotic Awareness Week, Life Healthcare pledges to join the fight against antibiotic resistance

Johannesburg, South Africa: [World Antibiotic Awareness Week](#) runs from 16 to 22 November 2015.

Antibiotic resistance is one of the biggest threats to global health today and leads to longer hospital stays, higher medical costs and increased mortality, while contributing to bed shortages, warns [Life Healthcare](#).

"Antibiotics are a critical and threatened health resource. Antibiotic resistance is rising to dangerously high levels and compromising the healthcare system's ability to treat infectious diseases. It can affect anyone, of any age, anywhere," says Dr Liam Brannigan, Intensivist, Life The Glynnwood, Benoni, Gauteng. "Unless serious measures are implemented, we are heading toward a major public safety issue. We have to work together to handle antibiotics with care so they remain as effective for as long as possible," he warns.

Antibiotic resistance happens when bacteria change and become resistant to the antibiotics used to treat the infections they cause.

"Antibiotic resistance occurs naturally and the constant evolution of bacteria is normal, but misuse of antibiotics in humans and animals is accelerating the process. Patients infected with drug-resistant organisms are more likely to have longer and more expensive hospital stays, and may be more likely to die as a result of the infection. When the drug of choice for treating their infection doesn't work, they require second or third choice drugs that may be less effective, more toxic, and more expensive. Antibiotic resistance raises the risk of basic treatable infections becoming untreatable," says Dr Brannigan.

There are multiple drivers of antimicrobial resistance which have a major impact in a hospital setting. So, what can we do to slow down the evolution of antibiotic resistance?

Patient communication and education

The patient has a very important role to play in keeping antibiotic resistance from spiralling out of control. Patients need to be informed about the need to take the right dosage of the right antimicrobial at the right time. "Patients should always take the full course of antibiotics, only use antibiotics when

prescribed, and never share antibiotics. It's also important that patients ensure their vaccinations are up to date and regularly discuss this with their doctors. Working together, we can ensure antibiotics are used only when necessary and as prescribed," says Dr Brannigan.

Hygiene measures: all important yet often undervalued

The easiest and most important method to prevent the transfer of bacteria that everyone can practise in healthcare settings is appropriate hand hygiene. This should be practised by all healthcare workers, patients and hospital visitors. Infection Prevention at Life Healthcare is taken extremely seriously and is a high priority for all hospitals, as resistant organisms can persist on environmental surfaces.

"The application of basic infection control like thorough handwashing is essential for patient safety. One failure can transfer a million E.coli bacteria and increase the spread of hard to manage infections, so ensure your hands, instruments and environment are clean," says Dr Brannigan.

Joy Cleghorn, Life Healthcare Infection Prevention Control Risk Manager agrees. "Hand hygiene is the cornerstone of infection prevention and patient safety, and while this is vitally important in our healthcare facilities it is equally important in the community. Hygiene measures are all important yet often undervalued," she says.

The Hospital Antimicrobial Stewardship Program

A Hospital Antimicrobial Stewardship Program is vital to ensuring the proper use of antibiotics in a hospital setting. "Antimicrobial stewardship and the fight against antibiotic resistance is a collaborative effort between doctors, pharmacists, microbiologists, infection prevention specialists, pharmacists, nurses and other healthcare professionals. Doctor leadership and active participation by all is a key critical success factor," says Dr Lloyd Kaseke, Medical Advisor in the Life Healthcare Clinical Directorate.

An antimicrobial stewardship programme was started several years ago in Life Healthcare hospitals to raise the awareness of the need to preserve the power of antibiotics through appropriate use. As the primary custodian of medicines, pharmacists are one of a number of health care professionals who can drive or influence the implementation of an antimicrobial resistance strategy at hospital level through a multidisciplinary approach. Based on their individual clinical skills or expertise, pharmacists can play a leadership or supportive role in multidisciplinary work groups and committees in the hospital.

"In association with the [Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University](#) we have invested in the development of a Life Healthcare clinical pharmacy short learning programme to further enhance the skills of 39 pharmacists with a particular interest in this area" says Shirley Leadbeater, Life Healthcare Pharmacy Practice Operations Manager. "Our pharmacists play an important and growing role in making a real impact within our ICUs and wards, and in successful antibiotic stewardship committees," she says.

With this in mind, Life Healthcare has invited all healthcare professionals to sign a pledge to join the fight against antibiotic resistance by supporting the principles of antimicrobial stewardship. **(See attached image)**

Life Healthcare constantly measure levels of quality and care at every touch point during the patient's journey throughout the healthcare system, in order to keep them healthy, well and protected. A hospital environment is able to provide great technology and innovation, but a great patient experience is all important at the end of the day. Our employees take great personal responsibility for delivering a consistently positive patient experience which you can expect at a Life Healthcare hospital, knowing that you are well cared for.

-ENDS-

Notes to the editor:

What is Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)?

Antibiotics and similar drugs, together called antimicrobial agents, have been used for the last 70 years to treat infectious diseases. Because antibiotics have been used so widely and for so long, infectious organisms have adapted to the antibiotics designed to kill them, making the drugs less effective. Antibiotic resistant bacteria are stronger and harder to kill, so a growing number of previously manageable infections like tuberculosis, pneumonia, and gonorrhoea are becoming harder to manage as the antibiotics used to treat them become less effective. <http://www.safecarecampaign.org/antibiotics.html>

What is the difference between antibiotic and antimicrobial resistance?

Antibiotic resistance refers specifically to the resistance to antibiotics that occurs in common bacteria that cause infections. Antimicrobial resistance is a broader term, encompassing resistance to drugs to treat infections caused by other microbes as well, such as parasites (e.g. malaria), viruses (e.g. HIV) and fungi (e.g. Candida). <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs194/en/>

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About Life Healthcare Group

Established in 1983, The Life Healthcare Group has more than 32 years' experience in the private healthcare and hospital industry. With headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa, the Group is a listed company on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The company's primary business is private acute hospital care with 63 healthcare facilities in seven of South Africa's nine provinces and one hospital in Botswana, as well as providing services for acute physical rehabilitation, acute mental healthcare and renal dialysis. Life Healthcare is the first and only South African hospital group to have achieved a multisite ISO9001 certification. Acute and long term hospitalisation services to public sector patients is provided by Life Esidimeni, while Life Occupational Healthcare services both occupational health and employee wellness to private and public employers. The Group includes an international presence through Max Healthcare in India and Scanmed Multimedix in Poland. The three

cornerstones of the Life Healthcare Group business and its commitment to patients are, **Life, Health** and **Care**.
For additional information about the Group, please visit lifehealthcare.co.za.