

## **MEDIA RELEASE: 30.5.19**

### **The rise of superbugs – death and disease in India and beyond**

Experts in antimicrobial resistance (AMR) will face a “QandA” style audience on Thursday night to unravel why 58,000 newborns die in India of resistant bacteria infection every year, and what this means for drug resistance throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

Drug-resistant infections are already responsible for more than half a million deaths globally each year, and the global and economic burden of infections resistant to antimicrobial drugs continues to grow at an alarming pace. It is estimated that by 2050, if left unchecked, the number of deaths caused by AMR pathogens in humans will rise to 10 million annually.

Professor Assa Doron, Professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies at the College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University, said that India poses a particular challenge for controlling AMR because it is one of largest manufacturers and consumers of antimicrobials globally, with easy access to non-prescribed medications for humans, and prolific use of antibiotics across the livestock and agricultural industries.

“One of the factors contributing to the rise of superbugs is the discharges of antibiotic-laden waste into the environment – India’s schemes to attract foreign capital may have come at the cost of inadequate waste management practices and lax regulations in the pharmaceutical manufacturing plants supplying international companies and domestic markets,” Professor Doron said.

Professor Alex Broom, Co-Director, Practical Justice Initiative, Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Sydney said that India’s pharmaceutical industry and the testing of effluents in and around drug manufacturing plants in some parts of India are worrying for local communities as well as other nations seeking to reduce resistance.

“These studies reveal extreme levels of antibiotic concentration contaminating the environment, rivers and lakes at levels even higher than previously thought, contributing to the emergence of multi-drug-resistant bacteria,” Professor Broom said.

“Closure notices have been sent by the Indian Government to dozens of companies in recent times, many of which also produce drugs for export to developed countries like the United States, Canada and European nations.”

Superbugs don’t respect borders, and Victoria and India have been swapping expertise to try to tackle the many root causes of drug resistance under Victoria’s 10-year India Strategy, including training and authorising nurses to lead infection control initiatives in hospitals in India and Victoria

Associate Professor Kirsty Busing, Acting Director of the Royal Melbourne Hospital’s Victorian Infectious Diseases Service, said that standing with a family at the bedside of a patient, for whom there are no antibiotics to treat their disease, is a situation that clinicians all fear.

“It’s important for people to realise that over the last 30 years, no major new types of antibiotics have been developed, so we need to treat drug resistance as an emergency issue,” Associate Professor Busing said.

**The QandA will be on Thursday at 5.30pm at the Yasuko Hiraoka Myer Room, Parkville.**

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