

Editorial

Invisible but deadly: Tackling the silent rise of antimicrobial resistance.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a growing threat to global health, and we, in Sri Lanka are no exception to being adversely affected by it. We need to explore the rising rates of AMR, discuss the need for surveillance, conduct stewardship programmes and public health interventions, and highlight local research and strategies being employed to combat this issue. This aligns with the SLJID's focus on infectious diseases and the need to address critical and emerging health threats. Over the years we have published many articles addressing AMR to highlight its importance to our readership.

AMR can easily turn a once easily treatable condition into a potentially lethal disease. It is a complex challenge that demands immediate attention from policymakers, healthcare professionals, and the public alike. Over the past few decades, the misuse and overuse of antimicrobials has led to an alarming increase in resistant pathogens. This spans across various infectious diseases, including, but not limited to, bacterial infections such as pneumonia, urinary tract infections, and sepsis, as well as vector-borne diseases like malaria and leishmaniasis.

Among the various factors contributing to the rise of AMR, many are closely tied to healthcare practices and societal behaviour. A primary driver is the over-prescription of antibiotics, without appropriate diagnostic testing, leading to the use of broad-spectrum drugs that promote resistance. Additionally, the sale of antibiotics over-the-counter without prescriptions has enabled self-medication practices, leading to improper use. In addition, limited public awareness of the dangers of AMR has contributed significantly to many people being unaware of the risks associated with misuse of antibiotics such as not completing a prescribed course of treatment or using antibiotics for uncomplicated viral infections.

Bold and coordinated action is required to address the threat of AMR. Lack of comprehensive surveillance systems for tracking AMR trends has hindered the ability to effectively manage and contain AMR outbreaks. Thus, one of the most critical steps to combat AMR is to establish nationwide AMR surveillance systems to monitor resistance patterns and timely updating of treatment guidelines accordingly.

Education and awareness campaigns are essential in changing public behaviour around antibiotic use. Such campaigns must be tailored to local contexts, leveraging the community engagement to reach diverse populations. Equally important is strengthening the regulatory framework surrounding antibiotic sales and prescription practices. Stringent enforcement of regulations preventing over-the-counter sales of antibiotics, and implementing antimicrobial stewardship, can significantly reduce the unnecessary use of antibiotics.

With concerted actions, improved surveillance, enhanced public education, and better stewardship of antibiotics, the impact of AMR could be mitigated. A united response is essential to ensure that future generations continue to benefit from the life-saving potential of antibiotics. We hope that the contents of the SLJID will continue to ignite in you the passion to actively contribute to combating AMR and the infectious diseases. The time to act is now!

Hermali Silva

Assistant Editor – Sri Lankan Journal of Infectious Diseases

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2288-1294>