

The fight against **Antimicrobial Resistance** requires a focus on the **health workforce**

Why pay attention to antimicrobial resistance (AMR)?

Antimicrobial agents like antibiotics are essential to treat some human and animal diseases. Microbes, such as bacteria, can develop resistance to antimicrobials meaning that a drug such as an antibiotic is no longer effective in treating the infection. The development of resistance is caused by the incorrect use of these drugs, for example, using antibiotics (which help to treat bacteria) for viral infections like flu, or as a growth promoter in agriculture.

Because of this the world is running out of effective antibiotics to treat infectious diseases, and unless appropriate action is taken, decades of progress in health and medicine risk being undone.

In May 2015, the World Health Assembly (WHA) endorsed a global action plan on AMR and urged all Member States to develop national action plans. WHA72 (May 2019) called for an accelerated implementation.

Why focus on the health workforce?

The health workforce plays a critical role in delivering high-quality health services. The ability of health systems to perform well and respond effectively to health challenges, such as AMR, is dependent on an educated, effective, motivated, appropriately skilled and well-managed health workforce.

The Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030 and the European Strategic Directions for Strengthening Nursing and Midwifery towards Health 2020 Goals have emphasized the urgency of addressing health workforce challenges through effective education and training.

There are almost 7 million nurses in the WHO European Region and they deliver the highest proportion of direct patient care. Nurses play key and increasingly important roles in society's efforts to tackle public health challenges, including AMR.

How can a focus on the health workforce accelerate the fight against AMR?



The health workforce is at risk of getting into contact with resistant bacteria. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can spread through contact, for example, through a health worker's hands if he or she has been caring for a person with an antibiotic-resistant infection. Not only the health of patients is at risk but also the health worker's. Therefore, a core component in the fight against AMR is to ensure that measures and interventions exist for the effective prevention of infections (i.e. hand hygiene) and the appropriate use of antimicrobials.

What are WHO/Europe's priorities regarding AMR and health workforce?

Competency framework

Global and European frameworks have been developed to ensure the continuous strengthening of the health workforce to tackle the AMR challenge.

The WHO Competency Framework for Health Workers' Education and Training on AMR (2018) provides foundational normative guidance that helps to ensure that health workers are equipped with competencies needed to combat the spread of AMR, and that AMR is addressed in both policy and practice settings.

The framework seeks to support the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes within the following domains:

- Foundations that build awareness of AMR
- Appropriate use of antimicrobial agents
- Infection prevention and control (IPC)
- Diagnostic stewardship and surveillance.

Stewardship

Antimicrobial stewardship refers to interventions designed to promote the optimal use of antibiotic agents, including drug choice, dosing, route, and duration of administration. To address AMR, all clinicians and health care workers must become stewards of antimicrobials by prescribing them appropriately and educating their patients and colleagues on the proper use of this increasingly scarce medical resource. WHO/Europe has developed an online course on Antimicrobial Stewardship for a competency-based approach. It is free and accessible on OpenWHO (<https://openwho.org>) in English, French and Italian (planned: Russian version).

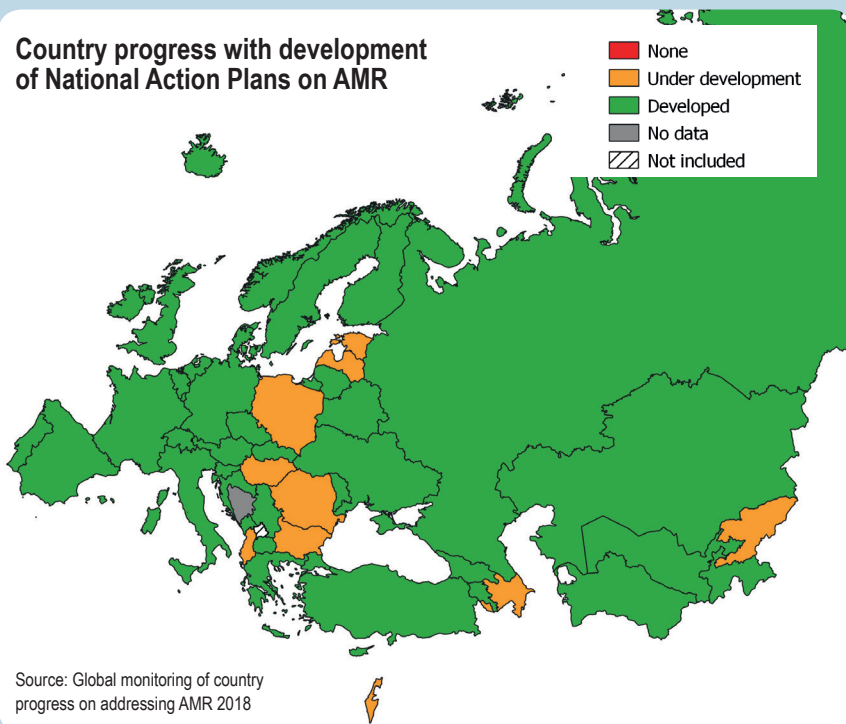
Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)

75% of the health burden of AMR is due to health care-associated infections. Appropriate IPC measures are therefore essential to prevent predominantly female health care workers from being exposed to an above average risk of AMR.

In 2016 WHO published an evidence-based Guideline on Core Components of IPC Programmes at the National and Acute Health Care Facility Level to prevent health care-associated infections and manage AMR at health care facilities and at the national level.

Achievements so far

Country progress with development of National Action Plans on AMR



National Action Plans on AMR and the health workforce:

Many WHO European Region Member States have developed National Action Plans on AMR (see map) which focus on IPC and training the health workforce. Actions include strengthening the knowledge, education and skills of the health workforce in the fight against AMR.

Stewardship Online Course:

23 000
enrolled learners from
174
countries after 1.5 years



«Infection Prevention and Control as well as Antimicrobial Stewardship is high on our agenda»

Valerie Ness from Scotland is a PhD student of nursing who has worked as a nurse for 21 years. She was aware of AMR when she first began her career, but it was not common practice to screen for it.

“At the time that I qualified, I rarely encountered patients with resistance,” Ness says. “We have certainly seen a rise in the number of antibiotic-resistant bacteria over the years. **Preventing their spread is high on the agenda for us because of nurses’ influence in lots of aspects of infection prevention and control.** Nurses are also a huge part of the health workforce – some can prescribe medicines and nurses can certainly have an influence on antimicrobial stewardship.”

Since 2002, Ness has worked as a lecturer at Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland, where approximately 1700 undergraduate nursing students are registered. She educates her students about the real dangers of AMR, as well as the fundamentals of infection prevention and control. Hand hygiene, following WHO guidelines, is introduced in the first year of clinical skills sessions.



The fight against AMR requires everyone’s commitment. Support us by giving this important issue the high priority it deserves, by taking the appropriate decisions and recognizing health workforce as an important accelerator!

Resources and contact

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