MEDIA RELEASE

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World Antibiotic Awareness Week: Act now to address a global health issue

Antibiotics must be used at the right time, in the right dose, for the right length of time, and for the right reason. These are among the important messages in Antibiotic Awareness Week 2015.

Endorsed by the World Health Organization, the theme of World Antibiotic Awareness Week (16-22 November) is "Antibiotics: handle with care," to spread the message that antibiotics must be used with care to minimise the risk of antibiotic resistance, which is associated with their misuse.

The event aims to extend awareness of the important and growing public health issue of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) is collaborating with other organisations on Antibiotic Awareness Week as part of a continuing drive to encourage the appropriate prescribing and use of antibiotics.

“We need to think about how we use antibiotics, and remember that antibiotics aren’t always appropriate when patients are unwell," said the Commission’s Senior Medical Advisor Professor John Turnidge.

The underuse, overuse and misuse of antibiotics has increased the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and is a growing public health concern worldwide.

“We face a very real problem of potentially being unable to treat infections because antibiotics become ineffective, if action is not taken now to address the global threat of antibiotic resistance,” said Professor Turnidge.

The Commission has undertaken a number of actions to ensure antibiotics are being used appropriately in Australia, including the Antimicrobial Stewardship Clinical Care Standard, released in 2014, which outlines the principles of safe antibiotic prescribing.

“The Commission has developed the Clinical Care Standard to provide guidance to clinicians and health service managers to help ensure optimal treatment for patients who require antibiotics for a bacterial infection," said Professor Turnidge.

Standard 3 of the Commission’s National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards “Preventing and Controlling Healthcare Associated Infection,” requires all healthcare services to undertake monitoring of antibiotic usage and resistance, along with other antimicrobials.
“All public and private hospitals in Australia have implemented the NSQHS Standards, and under Standard 3, are being encouraged to take action to improve antimicrobial prescribing practices,” said Professor Turnidge.

Through the Antimicrobial Use and Resistance in Australia (AURA) Project, the Commission is establishing an antimicrobial use and resistance surveillance system, which will enable a better understanding of antimicrobial resistance to inform action for prevention and containment of AMR.

As part of the AURA Project, the Commission partners with the National Centre for Antimicrobial Stewardship to fund the National Antimicrobial Prescribing Survey (NAPS), which enables hospitals to collect and analyse data on use of antibiotics and other antimicrobials, to identify areas for improvement.

“The 2014 NAPS report showed that about a quarter (24.3 per cent) of the 19,944 prescriptions surveyed were non-compliant with guidelines, and around the same proportion were deemed to be inappropriate,” said Professor Turnidge. “There are a number of areas where significant improvements in the prescribing of antimicrobials in hospitals can be made, including surgical prophylaxis.”

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Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care
The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) is an Australian Government agency that leads and coordinates national improvements in the safety and quality of health care based on the best available evidence. By working in partnership with patients, consumers, clinicians, managers, policy makers and health care organisations, our aim is to achieve a sustainable, safe and high-quality health system. As a result of its work, the Commission has an ongoing program of significant national activity with outcomes that are demonstrating direct patient benefit as well as creating essential underpinnings for ongoing improvement. The Commission aims to use its role as the national body for safety and quality in health care in Australia to ensure that the health system is better informed, supported and organised to deliver safe and high quality care.

Notes for Editors
- Antibiotic Awareness Week (AAW) 2015 is from 16–22 November 2015.

- AAW 2015 is being coordinated by the Commission in Australia, in conjunction with the Australian Government Department of Health and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, the Australian Veterinary Association, and state and territory health departments, and is supported in Australia by a number of professional societies and groups.