

Editorial

Extreme Misuse of Antibiotics During Covid-19 in Pakistan

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Editor

Extreme misuse of antibiotics was observed in Pakistan in 2021 when bactericidal drugs worth Rs120 billion were consumed in the country, officials and experts said, claiming that over 70 per cent of the antibiotics consumed by patients were unnecessary.

According to the official data available that oral and injectable antibiotic medicines worth \$119,745,122,879 were consumed in Pakistan in the year 2021 alone, which is around 10 per cent of the total expenditure on health in Pakistan. As per the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP), there are around 333 manufacturers of antibiotic medicines, both oral and injectable, in Pakistan, manufacturing different brands of 87 molecules (generic antibiotic medicines). These 333 drug manufacturers have 2013 antibiotic medicines registered with the DRAP, of which 1,604 are active products, which means that they are available in the local market.

“Last year (2021) was a unique year when an unprecedented increase in the consumption of antibiotics was observed all over the world, including Pakistan.

The expert claimed that due to abuse of antibiotics, most of the gram negative bacteria, which cause deadly infections, were not resistant to almost all the antibiotics available in the country, adding that new antibiotics which are effective against these drug-resistant bacteria are highly expensive and even not available in the country. “At the moment, we are faced with the problem of drug-resistant bacteria against whom we either have no or limited options available. This is because of extreme misuse of antibiotics in our society.

Claiming that the majority of people are consuming antibiotics unnecessarily in the country, an immediate end to over-the-counter availability of bactericidal drugs, ensuring presence of pharmacists at medical stores and in hospitals and rational prescription of antibiotic medicines by physicians in the country.

According to Pakistan’s drug laws, only a qualified pharmacist is authorized to provide antibiotics to a person at a pharmacy, but, unfortunately, hardly one or two per cent pharmacies in the country have trained and qualified pharmacists available during their business

timings. “Nowhere in the world, pharmacies and medical stores operate in the way they are doing in our country. We have uneducated and untrained people at pharmacies, who sell all kinds of medicines including antibiotics without even asking for a prescription. Similarly, our physicians are also misusing their authority and prescribing antibiotics without any justification, which is leading to antimicrobial resistance.

On the other hand, some of the pharmacists who tried to prevent the irrational use of medicines including antibiotics claimed that they were cursed and criticized when they tried to advise patients not to use antibiotics, steroids or other medicines not recommended for the treatment of their diseases.

Self-medication or advising against the use of antibiotics for the treatment of viral ailments, especially common cold and flu. We didn’t sell medicines without a prescription and offer telemedicine consultation with a pulmonologist or infectious diseases experts in case of suspected or even confirmed cases of Covid-19 during the peak of the pandemic.

Medicines are not sold to patients without prescription and if there is a discrepancy in the prescription, it is referred to the pharmacist or the physician.

In our country, Common Quality Management System (CQMS) should develop in consultation with the provinces to prevent the misuse and abuse of antibiotics as well as other prescription medicines.

To set a minimum standard for pharmacies throughout the country should plan to develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for pharmacies all over the country and want to introduce good distribution, storage and disbursement practices of medicines to the end users. The presence of trained and qualified pharmacists at every pharmacy in the country will be ensured to prevent self-medication and abuse of prescription drugs.

The presence of trained and qualified pharmacists at medical stores and pharmacies, not only the issue of misuse of antibiotics and other prescription drugs can be prevented but the patients can also be guided properly by pharmacists regarding proper dosage and duration of medicines they should take.