Hospital patients at risk of catching an infection

Doctors to trigger-happy with antimicrobials?

Doctors appear to be a bit too trigger-happy when it comes to giving patients antibiotics. A study conducted in 2010 and published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal found that at any one time, more than half of the patients in acute care settings were on one or more antimicrobials – an umbrella term for drugs including antibiotics, that destroy or inhibit the growth of bacteria.

Not all patients on antimicrobials had infections, some were prescribed the drugs as a precaution against infection. The government-funded study, spanning 12 public and private hospitals, found the use of antimicrobials was “surprisingly high.”

It was much higher in the five private hospitals in the study than in the public sector. Two in three of these patients were on at least one antimicrobial, while 7 per cent had been prescribed more than six.

Associate Professor Hsu Li Yang, who led the study, said: “One in six is an alarmingly high number. At a reasonable level – one

The MOH spokesperson noted that the topic is one being watched by all major hospital authorities in the world and that hospital clinicians are working closely with experts to ensure the spread of resistant bugs is contained.

The study findings were published in Clinical Infection Diseases, a leading journal on infectious diseases, late last year.

The study found that half of all urinary tract infections and a quarter of hospital-acquired pneumonia and bloodstream infections were linked to the use of these drugs.

The findings showed how important it is to be careful about the use of antibiotics. New cases of antibiotic-resistant bacteria – known as hospital-acquired infections, or HAI – are being reported at a faster pace than ever before.

One in 10 globally catches bug while in hospital

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that hundreds of millions of patients around the world are affected by healthcare-associated infection (HAI). HAI is defined as any infection that occurs in a hospital, after the patient has been admitted, and cannot be attributed to their primary condition.

The World Health Organisation said its website, results in “prolonged hospital stay, increased morbidity and mortality, increased resistance of microorganisms to anti-microbials, microbe’s attachment to implants, increased blood pressure for hospital stays, high costs for patients and their family, and unnecessary deaths.”

The WHO said the global problem took on new dimensions due to the “difficulty in gathering information accurately.”

One in 10 patients worldwide would catch a bug while in hospital.

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Health said only a few countries have attempted to study the use of antimicrobials such as the one Singapore conducted.

But since methodology and patient populations would be different, it does not compare well with other studies, the spokesperson added.

It is difficult to compare the results of the study to determine the current prevalence of healthcare-associated infections and antimicrobial use in Singapore as well as to identify priority areas for improvement.

The findings of the study are intended to provide a baseline for future prospective interventions and the subsequent study will provide a better understanding of the causes and cost of healthcare-associated infections and antimicrobial use in Singapore.

Study involved 5,415 patients

The study – the first of its kind carried out here – was conducted on 5,415 patients in 13 acute hospitals in Singapore, including those that are open 24 hours or more, and found that over 1,000 patients were being treated for conditions that were the result of infections.

More than one in nine patients here catch a bug while hospitalised. Half the patients in hospital are on at least one antimicrobial, the umbrella term for antibiotics, antifungal and antiviral medication. These are the key results of the first national study that points out areas where hospitals can improve on patient care. Senior health correspondent Salma Khalik reports the findings.

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