The European Antibiotic Awareness Day

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The European Antibiotic Awareness Day, which will have as its theme the need to stop unnecessary use of antibiotics, will take place on 18 November 2008. It is hoped that healthcare workers and other professionals, particularly those involved with child care, as well as the general public and members of the media, will participate in the various activities and discussions that will take place across Europe as part of this initiative. The European Antibiotic Awareness Day will be an annually recurring event that will raise awareness about the risks associated with inappropriate use of antibiotics and how to use antibiotics responsibly.

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Introduction

Widespread use of antibiotics is believed to be a major driver for the emergence, spread and persistence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. As much antibiotic prescribing is known to be unnecessary (e.g. for minor respiratory tract infections that are frequently of viral origin), a number of strategies have been adopted aimed at improving the quality of prescribing practice. Central among these has been improved education, not only of healthcare professionals,1 but also of the public;2,3 as many patients still harbour the expectation of an antibiotic prescription when attending medical consultations. The importance of public education becomes clear when it is remembered that 80% of human prescribing is in the community, and clinicians report that they often prescribe antibiotics not from medical necessity but because they perceive their patients want them.4

The European Antibiotic Awareness Day

In recognition of the need for increased public awareness about antibiotic use (and misuse), the 18th November 2008 will mark the first-ever ‘European Antibiotic Awareness Day’ which will involve participants from all EU Member States.5 The event is an initiative of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) working in close collaboration with the Institutions of the European Union and Member State authorities, the WHO and other relevant representative stakeholder groups such as the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID) and the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME). The overall objective of the European Antibiotic Awareness Day is to emphasize the importance of using antibiotics responsibly by reducing (ideally eliminating) their unnecessary use and to encourage people to follow their doctor’s instructions on how to take antibiotics in the appropriate way.

In addition to a range of activities being organized in individual countries, at EU level, the European Antibiotic Awareness Day will be marked by a scientific briefing and press conference in the European Parliament, Strasbourg. In the UK, activities are being organized by the Department of Health and the Advisory Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare-Associated Infection (ARHAI) and will include a conference at the science museum aimed at health journalists and a conference at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health entitled ‘Improving Antibiotic Prescribing for Children’.6 The latter conference will review the recently issued guidance from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) on the management of upper respiratory tract infections in children and adolescents (no or delayed antibiotic prescribing for acute otitis media, acute sore throat, the common cold, acute rhinosinusitis and acute cough)7 and will also consider the management of the septic child in the era of Prevenar. To involve the younger public in the day, the Department of Health have instigated a competition in which they have asked 11- to 14-year-olds to design a poster to help raise public awareness of prudent antibiotic use. The competition web site has a link into teaching resources covering microbes and antibiotic use from the European educational resource e-Bug.8 The public poster campaign encouraging the public to have plenty of fluids and rest instead of antibiotics for coughs, colds and sore throats will also be relaunched on the day.
It is hoped that on this day members of the BSAC and other healthcare professionals will also help to raise awareness of prudent antibiotic use locally. This could be something as simple as downloading an Antibiotic Awareness Day poster and putting it up in their local hospital, to contacting the local media about the day. Materials to use on the day can be found at http://antibiotic.ecdc.europa.eu/.

It is planned that the European Antibiotic Awareness Day will become an annual event which will hopefully sustain increased awareness on how to use antibiotics in a responsible way and thus help to preserve the usefulness of these invaluable drugs in the future.

Transparency declarations
None to declare.

References