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International experts call for major investments in antimicrobial stewardship programs

August 23, 2017, (Ottawa) A report¹ by a group of international experts has issued an urgent appeal to governments around the world to make major investments in the establishment of antibiotic or antimicrobial management programs.

“Antimicrobial resistance has become a public health crisis on a global scale,” says Dr. Andrew Morris, a co-author of the study and the Chair of the Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease (AMMI) Canada, Antimicrobial Stewardship and Resistance Committee.

“There is international agreement that antibiotic resistance is caused by the use of antibiotics,” adds Dr. Morris. *“The only effective way of reducing this resistance is controlling how we use antibiotics.”*

The problem, according to the report, is that antimicrobial stewardship programs are woefully under resourced.

“Billions of dollars are being invested in the development of new antibiotics and new diagnostic tests,” says Dr. Morris. *“Sadly, the money is not going into preventive antimicrobial management programs.”*

The report notes that in most countries, antimicrobial management teams either don't exist or are understaffed. They also tend to be concentrated in hospitals, even though 80% to 90% of antibiotics are prescribed in the community.

The report says that in some countries, including Canada, there are regulations making the establishment of antimicrobial management teams mandatory. However, these are not always enforced.

As a first step, the authors recommend that an international minimum be set for the number of staff required for antibiotic management teams, based on population.

In a recent presentation to a parliamentary committee, Dr. Morris characterized the public health threat in stark language. *“The current situation and the crisis we will be facing will be similar to the opioid epidemic. Only worse. The costs of ignoring antimicrobial resistance today will be paid many times over in lives lost.”*

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¹[http://www.clinicalmicrobiologyandinfection.com/article/S1198-743X\(17\)30384-1/pdf](http://www.clinicalmicrobiologyandinfection.com/article/S1198-743X(17)30384-1/pdf)