Antibiotic Use in UK’s COVID-19 Patients Often Unnecessary

Although few patients hospitalized with COVID-19 have a co-occurring bacterial infection, a recent study showed that a large proportion treated in UK hospitals receive antibiotics that often aren’t necessary.

Previously, a meta-analysis had found that roughly 75% of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 received antibiotics even though only 8% actually had a bacterial infection. In the more recent study, investigators analyzed data from nearly 49,000 patients admitted with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 to any of 260 UK hospitals between February and June 2020.

Among a subset of 36,145 patients, 37% had been prescribed an antibiotic before they were admitted and 85% of 46,061 patients included in the analysis received 1 or more antibiotics during their hospital stay. Yet only 1107 of the patients had a confirmed COVID-19–related bacterial infection, and most occurred more than 48 hours after admission. Antibiotic prescribing was highest in the chaotic early days of the pandemic before physicians had much information about the disease, according to the authors.

“While some COVID-19 patients will require antibiotics, mostly for secondary infections which develop after admission to hospital, our data shows [sic] that not all COVID-19 patients should be prescribed antibiotics,” according to a statement from senior author Antonia Ho, PhD, a clinical senior lecturer and consultant in infectious diseases at the UK’s Medical Research Council–University of Glasgow Centre for Virus Research.

Ho and her coauthors advised that physicians observe guidelines for more judicious prescribing to avoid contributing to emerging antibiotic resistance.

Urgent Need to Reduce Heart Disease Among Women Worldwide

One-third of women globally die of cardiovascular disease, yet women too often go undiagnosed and untreated, according to a report by a commission of 17 women experts from 11 countries.

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Patients in Afghanistan Face Growing Obstacles to Care

Ongoing violence and instability coupled with worsening economic conditions exacerbated by COVID-19 are jeopardizing access to health care in Afghanistan, according to a survey conducted in February by Doctors Without Borders, or Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

Roughly half the patients and caretakers surveyed said they delayed seeking care and about one-third stopped ongoing treatment in the past year. As a result, many patients arrived in critical condition, too late for survival. Three-quarters of those surveyed said cost was a primary barrier—56% reported borrowing money and 38% sold household items or animals to pay for care. Nearly one-third said violence or security concerns led them to delay care. For example, some were unable to travel at night or they had to navigate landmines and improvised explosive devices on roads.

Patients also have faced fewer options for care because of violence targeting health care facilities. MSF was forced to close a busy maternity ward in Kabul after attackers shot and killed 24 people including 16 mothers, a midwife, and 2 children. Karsten Noko, MSF’s project coordinator in Afghanistan, cautioned in a statement that politically motivated reductions in assistance for health care could worsen conditions there.

“Rather than cutting resources, international donors and health care providers should urgently review the challenges facing Afghanistan’s patients and health system, in order to reduce barriers to care,” Noko said. – Bridget M. Kuehn, MSJ

Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.