

LESSONS FROM EGYPT— PROTECTING THE POWER OF ANTIBIOTICS

Cultural roadblocks can sometimes stand in the way of addressing the danger of antimicrobial resistance. In Egypt, barriers are steadily coming down thanks to a national program that works closely with hospitals and communities to address healthcare-associated infections and change the way antibiotics are used.

Dr. Maha Talaat has led infection control and prevention work in Egypt for over a decade. She and her team are addressing the issues that can lead to the loss of effective antibiotics: misuse by people; laboratories lacking equipment to identify the source of infections; physicians lacking trust in systems; and widespread taboos against collecting and sharing personal health data.

Tackling a national problem begins one step at a time.

STEP 1: START COUNTING

In Egypt, no one knew exactly how widespread or what the main causes of drug-resistant infections were. The team worked with local and global experts to identify hospitals with the highest infection risk, and helped them reduce it based on what surveillance data revealed.

They began by looking for active infections in intensive care units in hospitals around Egypt, working with hospital laboratories to help identify pathogens, and using smart devices to gather patient information. They started small in 2010, but the program now reaches more than 50 hospitals with over 1500 intensive care unit beds, with more added every day.

STEP 2: MAKE IT POSSIBLE

At first, physicians did not trust the use of smart devices to gather data. However, nurses were excited to have state-of-the-art technology in their hands. Clinicians were soon won over by the ability to instantly see results and create reports.

STEP 3: MAKE IT VISIBLE

Before the surveillance program, hospitals were blind to the main pathogens causing infections in their patients and the number of patients infected. With data in hand, participating hospitals improved infection control practices to reduce the number of infections by 36 percent.

STEP 4: MAKE IT SOCIAL

The team launched a community-based pilot campaign to teach people to use antibiotics correctly. The campaign saw a striking reduction in antibiotic prescriptions for respiratory infections from 81% to 60.4%, proving that targeted education can translate into cultural change.

Reducing antibiotic resistance in Egypt depends on strong partnerships with the Egyptian Ministry of Health, Ministry of Higher Education, USAID, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion, and the World Health Organization (WHO).

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Infection prevention and control specialists travel in Egypt.

Read the full story: http://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/healthprotection/gdd/stories/egypt_power_of_antibiotics.html