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Stop prescribing drugs for fever, cold, medical body will tell docs

DurgeshNandan Jha, New Delhi:

'Overuse Of Meds A Major Health Risk' Faced with the scary prospect of losing lives to simple infections in the future, India is finally waking up to the dangers of reckless antibiotic use. The Indian Medical Association, a pan-India voluntary organization of doctors, will on Sunday launch a nationwide awareness programme on overuse of the life-savers, a practice that has led to the emergence of drug-resistant organisms. The IMA will also ask fellow practitioners to avoid unnecessary prescriptions such as recommending antibiotics for patients with fever and cold, which are generally caused by viral infections.

"In the past two decades, almost no new antibiotic has been discovered while bacteria have learnt to overcome the existing ones. If we don't conserve our antibiotics, a day will come when simple infections will become life threatening," said Dr Narender Saini, secretary general of the IMA.

Saini said IMA plans to hold lectures and 'training of trainers' aimed to press for rational use of drugs among the medical fraternity. The IMA, he added, has 2.5 lakh doctors registered with 1,700 branches and all will be part of the initiative.

Several researches, including those by WHO, have revealed over-the-counter sale of antibiotics is rampant in the country. There is also lack of knowledge on the exact use of each antibiotic among physicians.

"Over-prescription of antibiotics is a reality and we must act to check this practice. I welcome IMA's move," said Dr Anoop Misra, chairman, the Centre of Excellence for Diabetes, Obesity, Metabolic Diseases and Endocrinology (Fortis-C-DOC). Dr Anoop Mishra said government should put in place a mechanism to audit the prescription of antibiotics, particularly the second and third generation ones, in all hospitals and nursing homes. "Disease causing microorganisms have evolved at a higher speed than drug development. If we don't check overuse of existing antibiotics, we will hit a dead-end soon," said Dr Sumit Ray, vice-chairman, critical care medicine at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital.

Health experts say no new groups of antibiotics have been developed since the 1990s.

"Carbapenem is the last group of antibiotics developed worldwide. There have been modifications to the available antibiotics but no new drug has come up. This is despite an increase in drug-resistant microorganisms. The New Delhi superbug or New Delhi Metallo-B-Lactamase 1 (NDM1) is just one example," said Dr Ray.

The medical fraternity in Europe has been observing antibiotic awareness day since year 2008.

Public health experts say it is good that India has woken up to the need finally. "The burden of bacterial diseases in India is among the highest in the world. A large population is immune-compromised on account of diseases such as diabetes, heart diseases and cancer. These people are at higher risk of infection. Preservation of highend antibiotics should be of utmost importance here," said Dr Sanjeev Bagai, another senior doctor.

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