Antibiotic resistance is no longer a far a distant threat of the future, rather a major obstacle here and now. A report released by the U.N. s World Health Organization (WHO) warns that bacterial resistance is a devastating and rapidly growing crisis that can affect anybody in any part of the world. Keiji Fukuda, assistant director general for health security at WHO, comments, "The world is headed for a post-antibiotic era, in which common infections and minor injuries which have been treatable for decades can once again kill.

Indeed, the WHO s global report on antibiotic resistance, encompassing data from 114 countries, describes once common infections as untreatable in many patients. A many as 10 countries reported having patients with gonorrheal strains resistant to every known antibiotic.

In addition, the WHO says, Resistance to one of the most widely used antibiotics for urinary tract infections caused by E. coli - medicines called fluoroquinolones - is also very widespread. Even the most potent antibiotics at our current disposal, called carbapenems, are unable to provide adequate protection and immunity against new evolving superbugs. The WHO states, carbapenems now do not work in more than half of people with common hospital-acquired infections caused by a bacteria called K. pneumoniae, such as pneumonia, blood infections, and infections in newborn babies and intensive-care patients.

Antibiotics have been architects of our heretofore-successful fight against common and deadly bacterial pathogens. However, misuse and overuse of antibiotics has resulted in resistance, affecting all populations worldwide. Fukuda cautions, Unless we take significant actions to improve efforts to prevent infections and also change how we produce, prescribe and use antibiotics, the world will lose more and more of these global public health goods and the implications will be devastating,"

Professor Laura Piddock, director of the Antibiotic Action campaign at Birmingham University,
advises, The world needs to respond as it did to the AIDS crisis of the eighties. She recommends, a fully funded mandatory global surveillance program will document the size of the problem and funded public education will help minimize use as starting points, adding, We still need a better understanding of all aspects of resistance as well as new discovery, research and development of new antibiotics."

ACSH s Dr. Gil Ross had this comment: As we in medicine and public health try to cope with this new paradigm, in which many of our old reliable microbe-killers are no longer effective, we must work hand-in-hand (or glove) with multiple stakeholders to help minimize the spread of resistance. Productive targets for such educational outreach include patients receiving the drugs, doctors prescribing them, and even farmers using them in animal feed as growth supplements. On a larger scale, government funding and policy should encourage the development of new antibiotics and diagnostic tests that can swiftly identify a pathogen, and yield more targeted and prudent use of the drugs.

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