



High level of antibiotic use



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NEW ANTIBIOTIC – NO APPROVAL



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A new drug for treating multi-resistant tuberculosis has been available since 2019. Pretomanid was developed by the non-profit TBAliance. Much of the research was done in South Africa. So far, however, the drug has only been approved in the USA. It's too expensive for poor countries. The combination therapy with the new drug costs more than US\$1,000 per person.

South Africa's consumption of antibiotics is very high, and its resistance rates are among the highest in the world. Resistant germs can be deadly, especially for the many people with HIV/AIDS or tuberculosis. 11,000 of the 300,000 new cases of tuberculosis in South Africa in 2019 were multi-resistant.

"We observed that the number of prescriptions was rising, and a wide variety of antibiotics were being used – for longer than was necessary. This culture of antibiotic overuse must stop now."

Azraa Cassim Paruk, pharmacist, South Africa

TEAMWORK AGAINST RESISTANCE

So-called Antibiotic Stewardship Committees have been set up in many South African hospitals. They are designed to ensure that antibiotics are used properly. Teamwork is a top priority: physicians, pharmacists and nurses discuss cases to ensure optimal treatment.



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Too much of a good thing?



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In Germany, a quarter of people with health insurance are given an antibiotic at least once a year. And the treatment is often not absolutely necessary. But many GPs think their patients expect them to prescribe an antibiotic.



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SOMETIMES IT'S FINE WITHOUT ONE

Many women take antibiotics for bladder infections. Yet often, drinking a lot is all that's necessary. In half of those affected, the inflammation subsides even without antibiotics.

"Antibiotics are prescribed in a social context. The power of experience and habit play a role; so do supposed expectations and time pressure."

Roland Tillmann, GP in Bielefeld



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GOOD COMMUNICATION IS THE BE-ALL AND END-ALL

Many antibiotics are prescribed unnecessarily. When doctors discuss the pros and cons with patients, only half decide to take antibiotic treatment.

Good communication reduces the number of unnecessary prescriptions. In the AnTiB (Antibiotic Therapy in Bielefeld) project, physicians exchange information at the local level. Together, they develop guidelines on when and how to prescribe antibiotics.

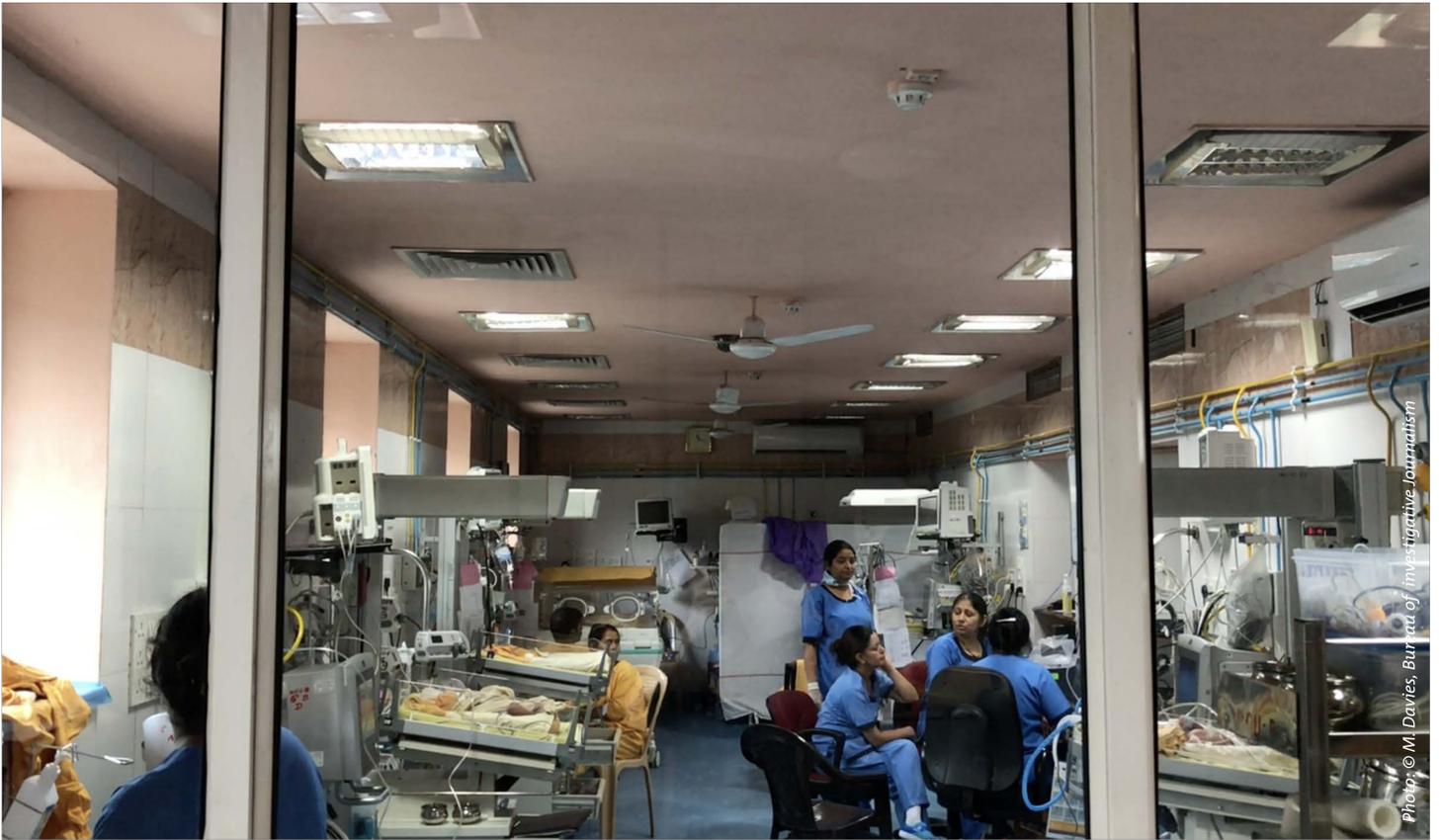


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Gloomy outlook



MORE RESEARCH

GARDP, a non-profit research initiative, develops new antibiotics. Research focuses on diseases with a particularly high level of resistance. For example, blood poisoning in newborns. The German Government also supports GARDP.

In India, many antibiotics are already no longer effective because they are used far too frequently. Tuberculosis and cholera are becoming increasingly difficult to treat. Every year, 58,000 newborns die from resistant germs. The infections are transmitted by poor hygiene in infant wards.

“In rural areas of India, there are five times as many healers practising as trained doctors. So it’s not surprising that most antibiotics find their way to patients in this way.”

Ramanan Laxminarayan, professor, USA



Antibiotics are often available in pharmacies in India without a prescription.

FASTER DIAGNOSES

Many physicians in India prescribe ‘reserve’ antibiotics just in case. This is because, if the patient is ill, it often takes days before the test result comes in and the appropriate antibiotic therapy can be determined. That’s why experts are calling for quick tests.



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Well advised?



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In Tanzania, there are only three pharmacists per 100,000 people. By comparison, in Germany there are over 70.

DOING IT BETTER:

To improve the supply of medicines in rural areas, small shops are also allowed to sell certain medicines. They become what are known as Accredited Drug Dispensing Outlets, or ADDOs. The condition for this is that the staff must previously undergo training which also covers the correct use of antibiotics.

“The threat from antibiotic resistance will have catastrophic consequences. It’s our children and grandchildren who will feel the devastating effects of antibiotic resistance.”

Eva Ombaka, professor of pharmacy, Tanzania

Many people in Tanzania even use antibiotics for colds or diarrhoea. They can buy the drugs – even individual tablets – without a prescription at markets or drug stores. This is prohibited, but medical care and good advice is not available everywhere. Many people therefore treat themselves and, in this way, promote the development of resistance.



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EDUCATION

The non-profit RBA initiative in Tanzania offers information and education nationwide. They use radio broadcasts and school workshops to inform young people about the correct use of antibiotics.



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