7 August 2014

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service leading the way in research

As a result of a collaborative study between the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) and the University of Queensland (UQ), the Australian Research Council (ARC) has approved a grant of $172,117 for research on the implications of over-prescribing antibiotics.

SCHHS Infectious Diseases Physician Dr Jennifer Broom said there is broad recognition by clinicians and researchers internationally that in the next few decades, there may be no antibiotic options left to treat the rapidly increasing number of highly resistant superbugs.

“Overuse of antibiotics, reduced antibiotic development and discovery, and increasing antimicrobial resistance could create a global ‘antimicrobial perfect storm’ and so this has become an urgent public health concern,” Dr Broom said.

“Many doctors over-prescribe antibiotics because they want the best and fastest outcomes for their patients.

“Long-term risks are not prioritised because of the immediate concerns around treating the patient and avoiding adverse outcomes.

The Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service has an active and innovative Antimicrobial Stewardship Programme (lead by Dr Jennifer Broom) that is focussing on optimising antibiotic prescribing within the Health Service.

“Our concern is the overuse of antibiotics in Australian hospitals is contributing to the global crisis of diminishing efficacy of antibiotics and the proliferation of resistant bacteria.”

Dr Broom said understandably, doctors are concerned about the professional risks of being seen as under-treating patients but this must be weighed up against the longer-term population risks of over-treating and thus contributing to antibiotic resistance.
The results of the research revealed a major challenge to Australian doctors in terms of whether they were able and willing to prioritise long-term antibiotic protection to ensure the health of Australia’s future generations.

The project will address this issue on multiple levels within the hospital system including examining the role of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and executive management. It will describe individual hospital hierarchies and practices that may not conform with established national guidelines.

Health Service Chief Executive Kevin Hegarty said that Dr Broom’s involvement in this exercise demonstrates the calibre of the Health Service clinical staff not only in high quality service delivery but also in the increasingly important area of research. Research will be a key element of how health care will be delivered at the Sunshine Coast Public University Hospital which will open in late 2016.

ENDS

Media opportunity exists to interview Dr Jennifer Broom to discuss the project. Please contact Jude Rhodes (details below) for a mutually convenient time.

Media contact: Jude Rhodes Tel: 5470 6616 or 0408 713 747

Facts:

Associate Professor Alex Broom (School of Social Science, University of Queensland) is leading the project.

The project funding grant of $172,117 is spread over a three-year period (mid-2014 – 2017) and will explore the social underpinnings of antibiotic decision-making, incorporating professional, lay and managerial perspectives.

This project will be promoted in a major public lecture by Associate Professor Alex Broom funded by The Australian Sociological Association, at the National Library, Sydney, on 17 September 2014. An expert panel will discuss the research findings in the context of antibiotic resistance and health care delivery in Australia today and for the future.

This is an opportunity to engage the public in the debate around antibiotic prescription and delivery and to promote this successful research collaboration on the national stage.