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Antibiotics: handle with care!

This week is the first World Antibiotic Awareness Week (16 to 22 November 2015), endorsed by the World Health Organization to highlight the risks of antibiotic resistance - a rapidly increasing international crisis.

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) is participating in the international campaign, “Antibiotics: handle with care”.

Staff Specialist Infections Diseases Physician, Dr Jennifer Broom said antibiotics were a precious resource, essential to our current health services, that could be lost through excessive antibiotic use, leading to antibiotic resistance.

“This means that an antibiotic which used to work may no longer be able to treat the infection,” Dr Broom said.

Antibiotics are one of the most common medicines that patients will receive in hospital. On any given day in Australian hospitals at least 38 per cent of patients are on antibiotics, yet 23 per cent of antibiotic prescribing in hospitals in Australia (National Antimicrobial Prescribing Survey 2014) may be inappropriate.

“Inappropriate antibiotic use includes treating patients for a longer period than is necessary, prescribing a broad spectrum antibiotic when a more specific one can be effective, or prescribing an antibiotic for a virus which will not respond to antibiotics,” Dr Broom said.

“Antibiotic resistance can affect anyone, of any age, in any country; but working together we can ensure antibiotics are used only when necessary and only as prescribed.

“SCHHS has an innovative, research-based antimicrobial stewardship program to optimise the way we use and prescribe antibiotics.”

Dr Broom is collaborating with Professor Alex Broom and a team of researchers at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in a multicentre research program which is examining the social reasons why antibiotics are over-prescribed in hospitals. The evidence produced from this research program is being used to design a unique antimicrobial stewardship program which uses all professional streams - including medical, nursing, pharmacy - to influence antibiotic prescribing.

“Our health service is committed to ensuring the right type and dose of antibiotic is used for each patient, using the collective expertise of our dedicated team of infectious diseases experts, clinical microbiologists, infection control practitioners, nurses and pharmacists, in combination with the critical research skills of our collaborators at UNSW,” she said.
This research program has resulted in an important recent publication in *Social Science and Medicine* highlighting the interaction between pharmacists and doctors in antibiotic prescribing.

**For more information on antimicrobial stewardship, visit**

**ENDS**

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