

ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE: A GROWING THREAT TO MODERN MEDICINE

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Abstract

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has become one of the most serious challenges affecting contemporary healthcare. The progressive loss of antimicrobial effectiveness threatens the treatment of bacterial, viral, fungal, and parasitic infections and creates substantial clinical, economic, and social consequences. The problem is particularly important in bacterial infections because inappropriate antibiotic exposure creates selective pressure that favors resistant microorganisms. Resistant pathogens may cause prolonged illness, treatment failure, recurrent infections, prolonged hospitalization, increased healthcare expenditure, and higher mortality. The consequences of AMR extend beyond infectious disease management because effective antimicrobial therapy is essential for surgery, organ transplantation, cancer chemotherapy, intensive care, and the treatment of immunocompromised patients. This article analyzes the principal mechanisms and drivers of antimicrobial resistance and evaluates contemporary approaches aimed at limiting its progression. Particular attention is given to antimicrobial stewardship, microbiological diagnostics, infection prevention, vaccination, surveillance, and the One Health approach. Strengthening rational antimicrobial use and improving early identification of resistant organisms are essential for preserving the effectiveness of existing medicines and protecting the future of modern medicine.

Keywords: antimicrobial resistance, antibiotic resistance, multidrug-resistant microorganisms, antimicrobial stewardship, infection control, microbiological diagnostics, One Health, public health.

1. Introduction

Antimicrobial medicines represent one of the most important achievements in modern medicine. The availability of effective antibiotics and other antimicrobial agents has dramatically reduced mortality associated with infectious diseases and has made many advanced medical procedures possible. Surgical interventions, organ transplantation, intensive care, chemotherapy, neonatal medicine, and treatment of severe immunosuppression all depend, directly or indirectly, on the ability to prevent and control infectious complications. However, the effectiveness of antimicrobial therapy is increasingly threatened by the emergence and dissemination of microorganisms that can survive exposure to previously effective medicines.

Antimicrobial resistance occurs when microorganisms develop biological characteristics that allow them to withstand the effects of antimicrobial agents. Resistance may occur naturally through genetic variation, but the process is accelerated by antimicrobial exposure and selective pressure.

Microorganisms possessing advantageous resistance characteristics survive treatment, multiply, and transmit resistance determinants to other microorganisms. This evolutionary process can gradually transform initially susceptible microbial populations into predominantly resistant populations. Although antimicrobial resistance affects bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites, bacterial resistance represents a particularly urgent clinical problem. Resistant bacterial infections are responsible for a growing proportion of difficult-to-treat healthcare-associated and community-acquired infections. The World Health Organization has identified antimicrobial resistance as a major global health threat and emphasizes the need for coordinated international surveillance and intervention. Recent global surveillance data indicate substantial resistance among important bacterial pathogens affecting the bloodstream, urinary tract, gastrointestinal system, respiratory tract, and other organs.

The development of antimicrobial resistance is closely associated with inappropriate antimicrobial use. Antibiotics may be prescribed unnecessarily when infections are viral or self-limiting, selected without adequate consideration of the likely pathogen, administered at inappropriate doses, or continued for longer than clinically necessary. In some settings, antibiotics can also be obtained without appropriate medical supervision, increasing the likelihood of self-medication and inappropriate treatment. Another important factor is the widespread use of broad-spectrum antibiotics. These drugs are often necessary for severe infections when the causative pathogen is unknown, but excessive use can eliminate susceptible microorganisms and create ecological conditions that favor resistant strains. The resulting alteration of the patient's microbiome may also facilitate colonization by multidrug-resistant organisms.

The transmission of resistant microorganisms represents a second major component of the problem. Hospitals provide an environment in which microorganisms can spread rapidly because many patients are vulnerable, invasive devices are frequently used, and antimicrobial exposure is common. Intensive care units are particularly susceptible to outbreaks involving multidrug-resistant bacteria.

Important resistant organisms include methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, vancomycin-resistant enterococci, extended-spectrum β -lactamase-producing Enterobacterales, carbapenem-resistant Enterobacterales, multidrug-resistant *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, carbapenem-resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii*, and drug-resistant *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. These organisms can cause severe pneumonia, bloodstream infections, urinary tract infections, wound infections, postoperative complications, and sepsis.

The molecular basis of antimicrobial resistance is highly diverse. Bacteria may produce enzymes capable of destroying antimicrobial molecules, modify the molecular target of a drug, reduce membrane permeability, activate efflux pumps, alter metabolic pathways, or develop protective biofilms. A single bacterial strain may possess several mechanisms simultaneously, resulting in multidrug resistance.

Horizontal gene transfer significantly accelerates the dissemination of resistance. Resistance genes can be transmitted between bacteria through plasmids and other mobile genetic elements. Conjugation, transformation, and transduction allow bacteria to acquire genetic information from other microorganisms, sometimes providing resistance to several antibiotic classes at the same time. Antimicrobial resistance has consequences that extend well beyond individual treatment failure. Patients infected with resistant organisms may require longer hospitalization, additional diagnostic procedures, more complex treatment regimens, and expensive second-line medications. Some last-resort antimicrobial agents have considerable nephrotoxicity, hepatotoxicity, or other adverse effects, creating an additional clinical burden.

The increasing prevalence of resistance also threatens routine medical care. If effective antibiotics become unavailable, procedures such as joint replacement, abdominal surgery, transplantation, chemotherapy, and treatment of premature infants may become substantially more dangerous. Thus, antimicrobial resistance represents a threat to the entire healthcare system rather than only to infectious disease specialists.

The problem is also closely connected with animal health and environmental conditions. Antimicrobials are used in veterinary medicine and agriculture, and resistant microorganisms can move between humans, animals, food products, soil, water, and healthcare environments. This interconnected system provides the scientific basis for the One Health approach, which considers human, animal, and environmental health as components of a single antimicrobial resistance ecosystem.

Improving antimicrobial use therefore requires intervention at multiple levels. Physicians need access

to accurate diagnostic information, patients require education regarding appropriate medication use, hospitals must implement effective infection-prevention programs, and national health systems require reliable surveillance networks. Agricultural and veterinary sectors must also participate in resistance-control strategies.

Antimicrobial stewardship has become one of the central strategies for addressing this problem. Stewardship programs aim to ensure that antimicrobial therapy is prescribed only when clinically indicated and that the selected medicine, dose, administration route, and treatment duration are appropriate. Effective stewardship reduces unnecessary antimicrobial exposure while maintaining patient safety.

Rapid diagnostic technologies have the potential to improve antimicrobial stewardship further. Traditional microbiological culture may require several days, whereas molecular methods can identify pathogens and selected resistance determinants much more rapidly. Earlier microbiological information allows clinicians to narrow empiric therapy and avoid unnecessary broad-spectrum treatment.

Vaccination is another important component of antimicrobial resistance prevention. By reducing the incidence of bacterial and viral infections, vaccines decrease the number of patients requiring antimicrobial therapy. Consequently, vaccination indirectly reduces selective pressure for resistance. The continuing development of resistance also highlights the importance of research into new antimicrobial agents and alternative therapeutic approaches. These include bacteriophage therapy, monoclonal antibodies, antimicrobial peptides, microbiome-based interventions, host-directed therapies, and novel approaches to disrupting bacterial virulence and biofilm formation.

The objective of this study is to examine the major clinical and biological factors contributing to antimicrobial resistance and to evaluate the importance of modern prevention, diagnostic, and treatment strategies in limiting its impact on contemporary medicine.

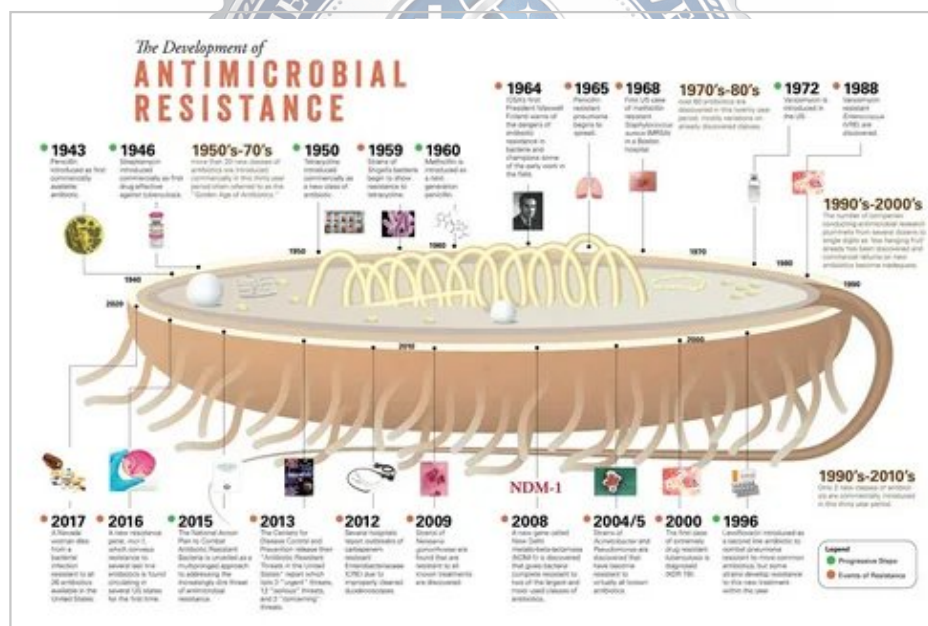


Figure 1. Figure 1

2. Materials and Methods

A descriptive analytical study was designed to evaluate the major factors associated with antimicrobial resistance and to assess the role of contemporary antimicrobial management strategies. The investigation was conducted using clinical, microbiological, and epidemiological information obtained from patients treated in tertiary healthcare institutions.

The study population consisted of adult patients presenting with clinically suspected or microbiologically confirmed bacterial infections. Patients were evaluated according to demographic characteristics, underlying diseases, previous antimicrobial exposure, hospitalization history, invasive procedures, infection site, microbiological findings, and clinical outcomes.

Patients were divided according to the susceptibility profile of the isolated pathogen. The resistant group included patients whose bacterial isolates demonstrated resistance to one or more clinically

relevant antimicrobial agents, while the susceptible group consisted of patients whose isolates remained susceptible to standard antimicrobial therapy.

Clinical data included age, sex, duration of illness, previous hospitalization, history of antimicrobial treatment during the preceding months, presence of chronic diseases, previous surgical procedures, use of urinary or vascular catheters, and admission to intensive care units.

Microbiological investigation included collection of appropriate clinical specimens according to the suspected site of infection. Samples included blood, urine, respiratory secretions, wound material, and other specimens when clinically indicated. Bacterial identification was performed using standard microbiological procedures and validated laboratory identification systems.

Antimicrobial susceptibility was assessed using standardized laboratory methods. The susceptibility profile of each isolate was interpreted according to contemporary internationally accepted microbiological criteria. Resistance to multiple antimicrobial classes was recorded to identify multidrug-resistant organisms.

Special attention was given to clinically important resistance phenotypes, including methicillin resistance among *Staphylococcus aureus*, extended-spectrum β -lactamase production among Enterobacterales, carbapenem resistance, and resistance to other clinically important antimicrobial classes.

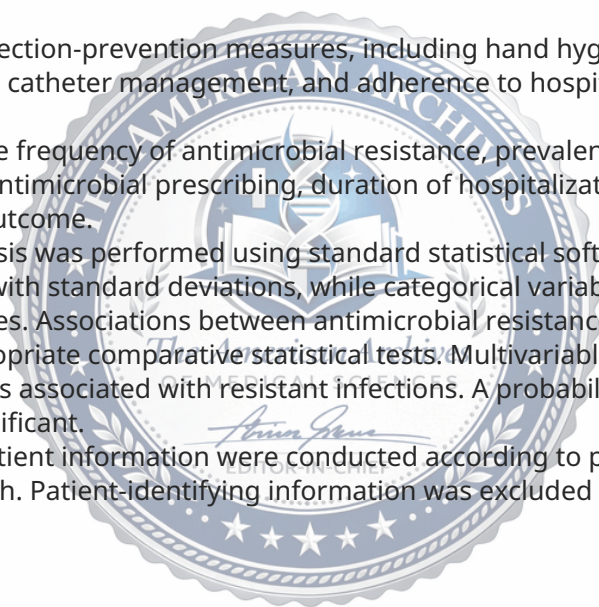
Information regarding antimicrobial therapy was collected from medical records. The investigators evaluated whether the initial antimicrobial treatment was appropriate, whether therapy was modified after microbiological results became available, and whether broad-spectrum therapy could subsequently be narrowed.

The study also assessed infection-prevention measures, including hand hygiene, isolation practices, environmental disinfection, catheter management, and adherence to hospital antimicrobial stewardship protocols.

The primary outcomes were frequency of antimicrobial resistance, prevalence of multidrug-resistant organisms, inappropriate antimicrobial prescribing, duration of hospitalization, treatment modification, and clinical outcome.

Descriptive statistical analysis was performed using standard statistical software. Continuous variables were presented as means with standard deviations, while categorical variables were expressed as frequencies and percentages. Associations between antimicrobial resistance and clinical variables were evaluated using appropriate comparative statistical tests. Multivariable analysis was used to identify independent factors associated with resistant infections. A probability value of $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

All procedures involving patient information were conducted according to principles of confidentiality and ethical medical research. Patient-identifying information was excluded from the analytical dataset.



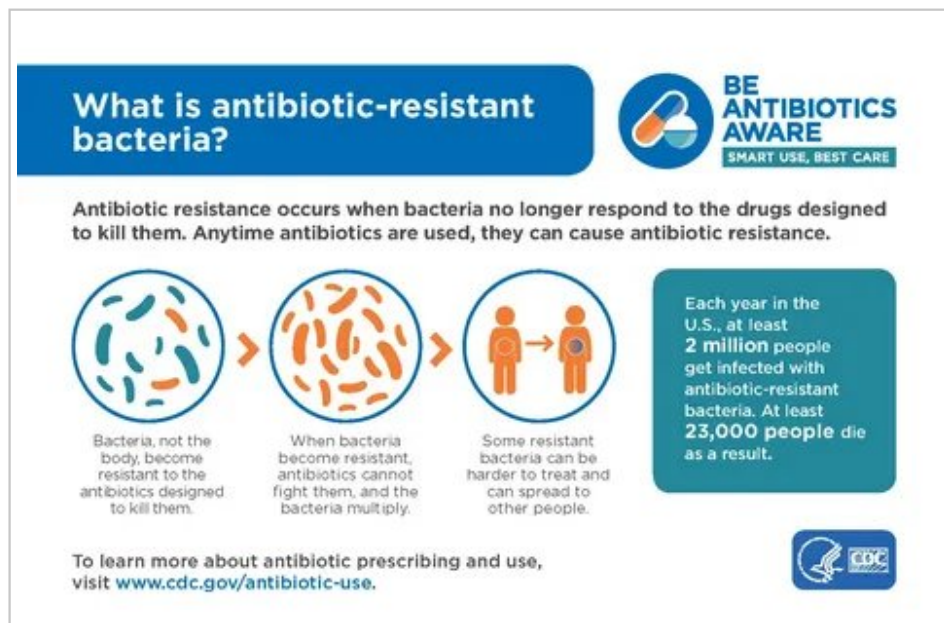


Figure 2. Figure 2

3. Results

The analysis demonstrated that antimicrobial resistance was associated with several clinical and healthcare-related factors. Patients with a history of recent antimicrobial exposure were more likely to present with resistant bacterial isolates than individuals without recent antimicrobial treatment. The association was particularly evident among patients who had received repeated courses of broad-spectrum antibiotics.

Multidrug-resistant organisms were identified more frequently among patients with prolonged hospitalization, previous intensive care exposure, invasive medical devices, and a history of recurrent infections. The highest frequency of resistant isolates was observed among patients with multiple underlying chronic conditions and those who had undergone previous invasive procedures. The microbiological analysis demonstrated considerable variation in resistance patterns between bacterial species. Gram-negative organisms showed particularly complex resistance profiles, with some isolates demonstrating simultaneous resistance to several major antibiotic classes. Extended-spectrum β -lactamase-producing Enterobacterales represented an important proportion of resistant isolates, while carbapenem resistance was observed in a smaller but clinically significant group.

Among Gram-positive organisms, methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* and resistant enterococci represented important causes of healthcare-associated infection. These organisms were associated with prolonged treatment requirements and increased use of second-line antimicrobial agents.

Urinary and respiratory tract infections represented major clinical sources of resistant bacterial isolates. Bloodstream infections caused by resistant organisms were less frequent but were associated with more severe clinical outcomes, including longer hospitalization and increased risk of systemic complications.

Analysis of antimicrobial prescribing demonstrated that empiric broad-spectrum therapy was frequently initiated in patients with severe infection before microbiological results became available. In a proportion of cases, antimicrobial treatment was subsequently modified after susceptibility testing. De-escalation from broad-spectrum to narrower therapy was associated with more appropriate antimicrobial exposure and reduced unnecessary antibiotic use.

Patients treated according to microbiological susceptibility results demonstrated better therapeutic targeting than patients whose treatment remained empiric for prolonged periods. Early availability of laboratory information facilitated more rapid modification of antimicrobial therapy.

Implementation of antimicrobial stewardship principles was associated with improved prescribing quality. Clinical review of antimicrobial therapy, appropriate dose selection, reassessment after microbiological results, and discontinuation of unnecessary antibiotics contributed to more rational

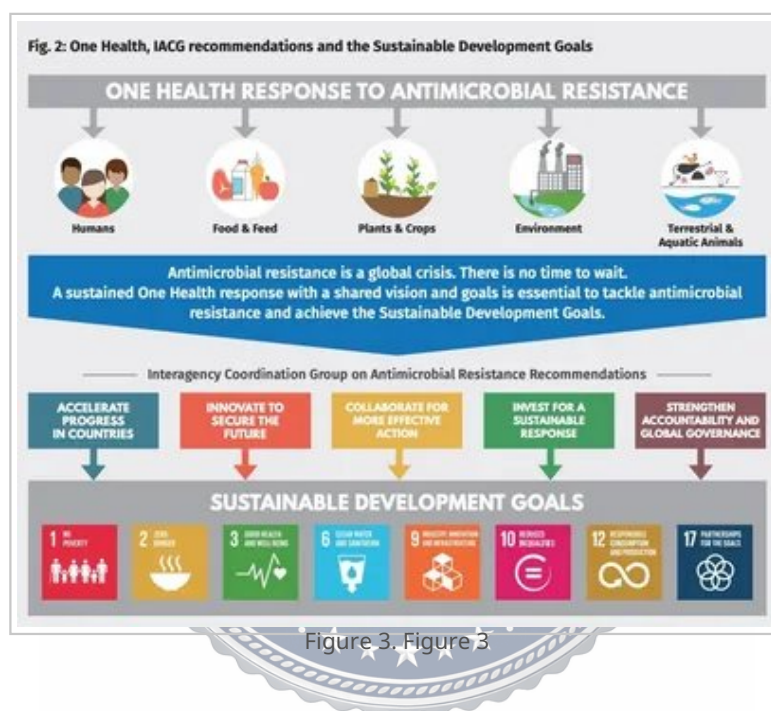
treatment.

The study also demonstrated an important relationship between antimicrobial resistance and duration of hospitalization. Patients infected with resistant organisms generally required longer hospital stays than patients with susceptible infections. This difference was particularly pronounced among individuals with bloodstream infections and severe respiratory infections.

Treatment failure was more frequent among patients infected with multidrug-resistant bacteria. Some patients required combination antimicrobial therapy, prolonged intravenous treatment, or transfer to specialized units for continued management.

The findings further indicated that inadequate infection prevention practices can contribute to transmission of resistant organisms. Areas with high patient turnover, inadequate isolation capacity, and inconsistent adherence to hand hygiene procedures demonstrated greater potential for transmission.

Patients with appropriate vaccination status and fewer previous infectious episodes generally had lower exposure to antimicrobial therapy. This finding supports the indirect role of vaccination in antimicrobial resistance prevention by reducing the number of infections requiring antibiotic treatment.



4. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that antimicrobial resistance is a multifactorial phenomenon influenced by antimicrobial exposure, healthcare practices, infection prevention, patient characteristics, and microbial evolution. The relationship between repeated antibiotic exposure and resistance emphasizes the importance of prescribing antimicrobials only when there is a clear clinical indication. Antimicrobial treatment exerts selective pressure on microbial populations. Susceptible organisms are eliminated or suppressed, while resistant variants have a survival advantage. Continued exposure can therefore increase the proportion of resistant organisms within an individual patient's microbiome and within healthcare environments.

The association between prolonged hospitalization and resistant infection is clinically important. Hospitalized patients are frequently exposed to antimicrobial agents, invasive procedures, and healthcare environments containing potentially resistant microorganisms. The combination of these factors increases both the risk of acquiring resistant organisms and the probability of subsequent infection.

The high level of resistance observed among several Gram-negative pathogens represents a particularly serious concern. These organisms can acquire multiple resistance genes and may rapidly become resistant to broad-spectrum β -lactams, fluoroquinolones, aminoglycosides, and other therapeutic classes. Carbapenem-resistant Gram-negative bacteria are especially problematic because carbapenems are often reserved for severe infections caused by organisms resistant to other

antibiotics.

The emergence of extended-spectrum β -lactamase-producing Enterobacterales also significantly limits treatment options. Such organisms can hydrolyze many commonly used β -lactam antibiotics, resulting in therapeutic failure if susceptibility is not appropriately recognized.

Resistance among Gram-positive pathogens remains clinically relevant as well. Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* can cause complicated skin and soft tissue infections, pneumonia, osteomyelitis, endocarditis, and bloodstream infection. Resistant enterococci are particularly difficult to manage in immunocompromised and critically ill patients.

One of the most important implications of the findings is the value of rapid microbiological diagnosis. Empiric antimicrobial therapy is often necessary in severe infections because treatment delays can increase mortality. However, prolonged empiric therapy without reassessment can lead to unnecessary exposure to broad-spectrum agents. Rapid identification of pathogens and resistance markers provides an opportunity to transition from empiric treatment to targeted therapy.

Antimicrobial stewardship should therefore be integrated into routine clinical practice. Effective stewardship is not synonymous with reducing antibiotic use at all costs. Its primary objective is to optimize treatment so that patients receive the most appropriate antimicrobial agent at the correct dose, route, and duration.

De-escalation is a particularly important component of stewardship. Once microbiological data become available, clinicians should reassess the initial treatment and, when clinically appropriate, narrow the antimicrobial spectrum. This reduces unnecessary ecological pressure while maintaining effective infection control.

The findings also emphasize that infection prevention is inseparable from antimicrobial resistance control. Appropriate hand hygiene, environmental cleaning, sterilization, isolation of patients carrying highly resistant organisms, and careful management of invasive devices can reduce transmission. Prevention of infection eliminates the need for antimicrobial treatment in the first place.

Vaccination provides another important preventive mechanism. By reducing the incidence of infectious diseases, vaccination decreases the number of antimicrobial prescriptions and therefore reduces opportunities for resistant organisms to emerge. High vaccination coverage should consequently be considered part of a comprehensive AMR strategy.

The One Health approach is essential because antimicrobial resistance does not remain confined to healthcare institutions. Resistant microorganisms and resistance genes can circulate between humans, animals, food production systems, wastewater, soil, and natural ecosystems. Effective national strategies should therefore include medical, veterinary, agricultural, environmental, and public health sectors.

Improving antimicrobial prescribing also requires better access to diagnostic services. In many healthcare settings, clinicians must initiate treatment without immediate microbiological information. Strengthening laboratory infrastructure, antimicrobial susceptibility testing, and local resistance surveillance can help physicians make more informed treatment decisions.

Education is another essential component. Healthcare professionals require continuous training regarding local resistance patterns, antimicrobial prescribing principles, treatment guidelines, and infection-control procedures. Patients should also understand that antibiotics are not effective against most viral respiratory infections and that self-medication can contribute to resistance.

The development of new antimicrobial therapies remains important, but new drugs alone cannot solve the problem. Any newly introduced antibiotic may eventually encounter resistance if it is used excessively or without appropriate stewardship. Consequently, preservation of existing antimicrobial effectiveness is equally important.

Emerging alternatives such as bacteriophage therapy, monoclonal antibodies, antimicrobial peptides, microbiome-based interventions, and host-directed therapies may provide additional options in the future. However, these approaches require further clinical validation before widespread routine application.

Artificial intelligence and digital health technologies may also contribute to AMR control.

Machine-learning systems can analyze clinical, epidemiological, microbiological, and laboratory data to predict the probability of resistant infection and support individualized empirical treatment. Digital surveillance platforms can identify changes in resistance patterns more rapidly than traditional reporting systems.

The economic implications of antimicrobial resistance further strengthen the need for prevention.

Resistant infections increase hospitalization costs, require more expensive medications, prolong treatment, and can lead to loss of productivity. Investments in infection prevention, diagnostics, vaccination, and stewardship may therefore generate substantial long-term healthcare savings. Overall, antimicrobial resistance should be regarded as a continuously evolving clinical and public health challenge. Successful control requires coordinated intervention rather than dependence on a single strategy.

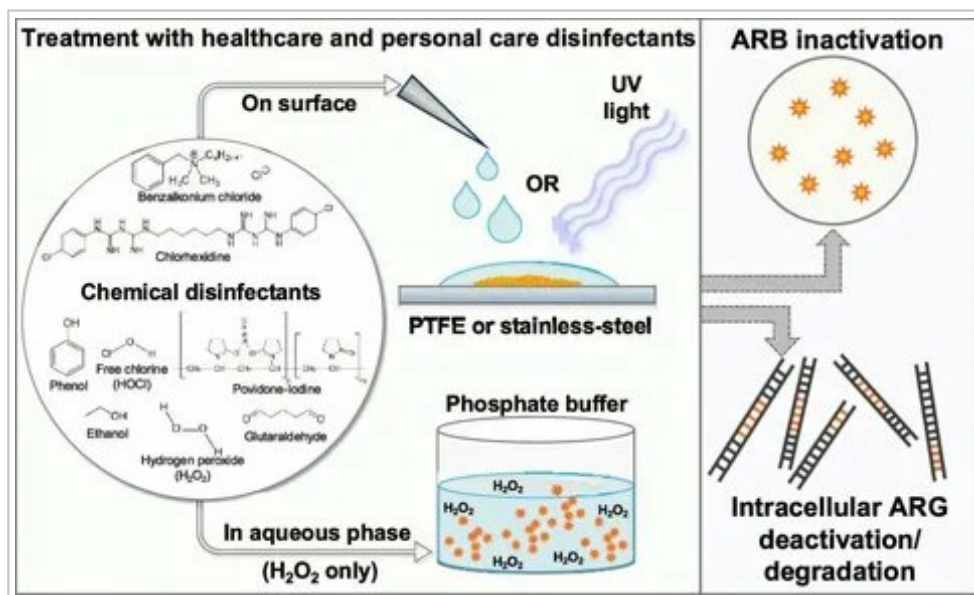


Figure 4. Figure 4

5. Conclusion

Antimicrobial resistance represents a major and growing threat to modern medicine because it reduces the effectiveness of essential antimicrobial therapies and complicates the management of common and severe infections.

The findings indicate that recent antimicrobial exposure, prolonged hospitalization, invasive procedures, intensive care treatment, recurrent infections, and inadequate infection-control practices are important factors associated with resistant infections. Multidrug-resistant Gram-negative and Gram-positive organisms can substantially increase treatment complexity and healthcare burden. Effective management requires a comprehensive strategy based on rational antimicrobial prescribing, rapid microbiological diagnosis, antimicrobial stewardship, infection prevention, vaccination, continuous surveillance, and appropriate isolation procedures.

Laboratory-guided treatment and timely de-escalation can reduce unnecessary broad-spectrum antibiotic exposure while maintaining clinical effectiveness. At the same time, strengthening infection-control programs can prevent transmission and reduce the overall need for antimicrobial treatment.

The One Health approach should remain central to long-term AMR prevention because resistance develops and spreads across human, animal, and environmental systems. Coordinated surveillance and responsible antimicrobial use across all these sectors are essential.

Future progress will depend on combining established measures with innovative technologies, including rapid molecular diagnostics, artificial intelligence, genomic surveillance, novel antimicrobial agents, bacteriophage-based therapies, and microbiome-targeted interventions.

Ultimately, preserving the effectiveness of antimicrobial medicines is a shared responsibility of healthcare professionals, patients, researchers, policymakers, agricultural specialists, and society as a whole. Early intervention, responsible antimicrobial use, and sustained international cooperation are essential to ensure that effective treatment remains available for current and future generations.

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