We must use antibiotics wisely to maintain their effectiveness

Antibiotics are a precious resource. Since their discovery, they have saved lives and enabled huge advances in medicine and surgery. Cancer treatments and organ transplantation would be impossible if there were no reliable antibiotics to treat patients with infection who are immunocompromised.

The UK government has published its five-year antimicrobial resistance strategy, offering a framework to improve health professionals’ knowledge, promote optimal infection control and improve antibiotic prescribing practice. The strategy encourages new drugs, treatments and diagnostics to be developed and identifies research funding. It also aims to increase the general public’s understanding of the potential harm of antibiotic resistance from medical use as well as that in veterinary, domestic and industrial settings.

We all have a role to play – those who prescribe antibiotics, those who prepare and administer them, and patients who receive them. Nurses who administer antibiotics must be able to answer questions from patients and carers. They must know why it’s important to finish a prescribed course, why antibiotics are inappropriate for a sore throat or common cold, how unnecessary antibiotics can drive the development of MRSA or *C. difficile* infection, and how each of us carries a responsibility to ensure antibiotics are used wisely.

Antimicrobial stewardship is part of the UK Health and Social Care Act (2008), and initiatives such as the Department of Health’s Start Smart – then Focus campaign for acute trusts have given health professionals an evidence-based approach to it. The campaign includes a range of audit ideas to help health professionals engage with the local community and promote best practice in the management and diagnosis of infection.

The Royal College of General Practitioners has also taken on antimicrobial stewardship as a clinical priority. The TARGET (Target Antibiotics Responsibly Guidance Education and Tools) initiative, developed by the Health Protection Agency and other professional bodies provides education and audit materials, along with tools to help manage public demand for antibiotics when they are not clinically indicated.

European Antibiotic Awareness Day, held on 18 November 2013, is an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of antimicrobial stewardship and educate people about the threat of antibiotic resistance to public health. First launched in 2008 as an initiative of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, EAAD is supported by other professional bodies including the World Health Organization and Public Health England. Let’s make it something to celebrate, and use the public and professional resources available to really make a difference. The message is clear: we must use antibiotics wisely if we are to maintain their effectiveness for future generations. NT

Find out more about TARGET at www.rcgp.org.uk and EAAD at www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/eaad

Jane Stockley is consultant microbiologist at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust

Adolescence is a tricky time for most, but for young people with diabetes it comes with added complications. Along with the usual physical changes and emotional turbulence, they must also deal with many health concerns and restrictions when all they want to do is fit in with their friends. They may also find it harder to assert their independence over parents and health professionals.

Our research report on page 23 explores a group of young people’s experiences of living with type 1 diabetes. As well as revealing that factors such as glycaemic control can help to predict how well they manage their diabetes independently, it gives an insight into living with diabetes at such a sensitive time and its effects on relationships with family and friends. Psychological support should be a key aspect of care to help this group accept the implications of their condition and its management.

Jane Stockley is consultant microbiologist at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust

Ann Shuttleworth is practice and learning editor of Nursing Times.

ann.shuttleworth@emap.com

Twitter @AnnNursingTimes. Don’t miss the practice blog, go to nursingtimes.net/practiceblog