Nurses: an underused, vital asset against drug-resistant infections

Christopher J L Murray and colleagues consolidated the evidence on the burden of drug-resistant infections, highlighting key pathogens and their unjust distribution worldwide, which demands a multifaceted, planetary response.

The success of this response would benefit from an interprofessional approach, which formalises the involvement of nurses, the largest and often most trusted health workforce, yet underutilised against drug-resistant infections. Although the worldwide nursing shortage threatens their contribution in antimicrobial resistance and activities to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, expanding antimicrobial stewardship nursing practice could future-proof health-care provision allowing medical specialists to focus on complex drug-resistant infections.

Regardless of the increasing number of nurses prescribing antimicrobials, or their influence on prescribing as knowledge brokers, at least three of the strategies proposed by Murray and colleagues—infection prevention and control, vaccination, and minimised use in humans—have substantial input from nurses. Addressing infections has historically been embraced by nurses, with many infection outcomes being influenced by nursing care. However, the value of nurses in stewardship should not be just centred on clinical work. Nurses are involved across the entire health economy and are excellent advocates to promote self-care and a salutogenic approach, and foster health literacy of antimicrobial resistance through effective communication and education. Nursing leadership and activism have been robust in
advocating for improvements to determinants of infections.³

Further nursing action in antimicrobial stewardship requires closing of the gaps in education⁴ and awareness of antimicrobial competencies⁵ and stewardship models, which recognise the nursing contribution. Additionally, antimicrobial stewardship nursing research could benefit from investment to achieve its full potential.

The planetary threat of drug-resistant infections should encourage the inclusion of nurses in the global response, eager as they are to embrace their potential.

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² Gotterson F, Buising K, Manias E. Nurse role and contribution to antimicrobial stewardship: an integrative
