

MEDIA ADVISORY

Ahead of UN meeting on antimicrobial resistance, campaigners call on Big Pharma to bring antibiotic pollution in their supply chains under control

15 September 2016

London/Brussels: Ahead of a United Nations high-level meeting on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in New York on Wednesday 21 September, a coalition of environmental and public health organisations is calling on the global pharmaceutical industry to tackle pollution in its supply chains, one of the root causes of increasing resistance to antibiotics.

With drug companies calling for billions of pounds in investment to develop new antibiotics in order to tackle AMR¹, the briefing released to the international media today "[Drug resistance through the back door: How the pharmaceutical industry is fuelling the rise of superbugs through pollution in its supply chains](#)" casts light on how industry heavyweights including Pfizer, Teva and McKesson are actually contributing to the AMR crisis through commercial ties with environmentally damaging antibiotics manufacturers including serial polluters in China and India.

Growing drug resistance is one of the gravest threats to human health this century. According to the AMR Review, an independent body commissioned by the UK Prime Minister in collaboration with the Wellcome Trust, global deaths as a result of drug-resistant infections are projected to reach 10 million per year by 2050, with cumulative economic losses of \$100 trillion. Medical experts warn that in the near future, common illnesses, minor surgery, and routine operations such as hip replacements could become high risk procedures.

Speaking ahead of the UN meeting, Sascha Marschang of the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), said "*A week from now, global leaders will come together to address one of the biggest threats to human health this century, antimicrobial resistance. While it is heartening to see the international community taking the threat of drug resistance seriously, rapid action is needed on all fronts to ensure that high-level concern translates into rapid and coordinated action at national and regional level on the human, veterinary, and environmental levers of AMR.*"

The pharmaceutical industry's responsibility to take action on the negative environmental and human health impacts of antibiotics production was noted by the AMR Review in its December 2015 report on the environmental dimension of AMR, which characterised pharmaceutical manufacturing pollution as "*a supply chain problem that pharmaceutical companies and their suppliers need to solve together.*"² However, most companies display a shocking lack of concern about pollution in their supply chains by failing to implement, or demand that their suppliers implement, environmentally sound manufacturing and waste treatment techniques.

In light of this, the organisations are calling on large purchasers of medicines, such as the UK's National Health Service (NHS), hospitals, and pharmacies to use their buying power to push for cleaner production processes and help stamp out pollution in their supply chains.

Natasha Hurley of Changing Markets said "*Big Pharma's role in fuelling drug resistance is all too often overlooked when policies to curb the spread of AMR are being discussed. Our research has shown that the industry is failing to take the necessary action to address the*

¹ BBC, Pharma 'cash call' for new antibiotics, 21.01.2016 <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-35363569>

² <http://amr-review.org/Publications>

threat of a looming environmental and public health crisis in which it is playing a key part. This is why we are calling for major purchasers of antibiotics to blacklist the worst offenders and send a message to the market that failure to bring antibiotic manufacturing discharges under control will directly impact companies' bottom line. With drug supply chains shrouded in mystery, we also need more transparency on the origin of our antibiotics."

The briefing recommends blacklisting pharmaceutical companies which are contributing to the spread of AMR through irresponsible manufacturing practices, beginning with Aurobindo, a Hyderabad-based drug manufacturer with numerous international subsidiaries, including Milpharm in the United Kingdom and Auromedics Pharma LLC in the United States. Aurobindo has been involved in countless pollution scandals in India and also has commercial ties with dirty antibiotics factories operated by some of China's largest drug companies, including NCPC, the country's biggest State-owned pharmaceutical group.

Emma Rose, from the Alliance to Save our Antibiotics said:

"Worldwide, significantly higher volumes of antibiotics are used in food animals than in human medicine, meaning that most environmental pollution within global pharmaceutical supply chains is associated with the manufacture of drugs for food production.

Today's briefing casts light on how big polluting factories are fueling the emergence of drug resistant bacteria. With prescribers of both human and veterinary medicine increasingly urged to take action on antibiotics, the pharmaceutical industry must now play its part in tackling this crisis"

Notes to the editor:

- A series of reports have recently highlighted the environmental and human health impacts of environmental pollution in the antibiotics supply chain. In March this year, the Swedish investment bank Nordea released an investigation into the "[Impacts of Pharmaceutical Pollution on Communities and Environment in India](#)" focusing on the heartlands of the Indian generic drug manufacturing industry, and in 2015, international online campaigning organization SumOfUs published an [exposé](#) of antibiotic pollution hotspots in Chinese pharmaceutical manufacturing hubs.
- The vast majority of the world's antibiotics are produced in Chinese and Indian factories, which frequently act as contract manufacturers to bigger domestic firms or multinational companies based in Europe or the United States. China is currently the world's largest exporter of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs)³, supplying over 50% of the global market⁴ and is the world's number one producer of penicillin salts.⁵ Over 80% of Chinese-made penicillin salts are exported to India⁶, where they are processed into end products and exported onwards to other markets around the world. India also has substantial API manufacturing capacity and in recent years,

³ Pharm Tech, The Weaknesses and Strengths of the Global API Market, 06.03.2013, <http://www.pharmtech.com/weaknesses-and-strengths-global-api-market>

⁴ Fierce Pharma, 30.08.2016, China drug exports to U.S. rise but companies struggle with quality <http://www.fiercepharma.com/manufacturing/china-drug-exports-to-u-s-rise-but-companies-struggle-quality>

⁵ The Pharma Letter, China's API industry is leading world production says new report, 05.06.2014 <http://www.thepharmaleター.com/article/china-s-api-industry-is-leading-world-production-says-new-report>

⁶ U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission, April 2010, Potential Health & Safety Impacts from Pharmaceuticals and Supplements Containing Chinese-Sourced Raw Ingredients http://origin.www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/NSD_BIO_Pharma_Report--Revised_FINAL_for_PDF--14_%20April_2010.pdf

Indian antibiotics manufacturers have made significant incursions into Western markets under brands including Aurobindo Pharma, Dr Reddy's and Lupin.

- Many of the antibiotics production sites in China and India, including ones approved by European and US inspection authorities, fail to treat waste from the manufacturing process appropriately, with the result that untreated or inadequately processed industrial effluent is ending up in soil, groundwater and waterways surrounding pharmaceutical production sites, fuelling the spread of drug-resistant bacteria around the world.
- For more information on the United Nations High-Level Meeting on Antimicrobial Resistance on Wednesday 21 September, see:
<http://www.un.org/pga/70/events/high-level-meeting-on-antimicrobial-resistance/>
- The Alliance to Save our Antibiotics' recent briefing on antibiotic-resistant E.coli in UK supermarket pig and poultry meat can be accessed here:
<http://www.saveourantibiotics.org/publications>