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HEALTH NEWS

Center to reduce antibiotic use

Health center doctors
are taking part in
the effort to reduce
bacterial resistance

By Ben Romano
Higher Education Reporter

The University Health Center is changing the way it prescribes antibiotics as part of a national effort to stem the tide of bacterial resistance to antibiotics.

"There has been a significant rise in bacterial resistance [to antibiotics] in the past 15 years that requires that we look at our prescribing habits," said Dr. Paula Ciesielski of the health center.

The specific changes in the prescription of antibiotics that the health center is making are in accordance with Center for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines to combat bacterial resistance. The health center is adopting a more conservative attitude toward the prescription of antibiotics.

"We will begin using narrow-spectrum antibiotics to target specific infections for the shortest time possible," Ciesielski said.

Ciesielski and Dr. Donna Scurlock, also of the health center, have been reviewing literature on this subject and have made a recommendation to the health center. A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association showed that 47

Antibiotics and Resistance

■ 47 percent of patients with upper respiratory infections, such as the common cold, are given antibiotics.

■ 98 percent of colds and other upper-respiratory infections are caused by viruses that are not affected by antibiotics.

SOURCE: Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)

■ Bacteria that cause pneumonia, strep throat and staph infections are becoming resistant to antibiotics.

■ Streptococcus pneumoniae, the bacterium that causes pneumonia, became 60 times more resistant to penicillin from 1987 to 1992. Resistance levels increased from .02 percent in 1987 to 1.3 percent in 1992.

SOURCE: Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

"We recently reviewed charts from spring term 1997 and found that we are in the same situation as most physicians in the nation," Ciesielski said.

The over-prescription of antibiotics on both national and local levels has contributed to the rise of bacterial resistance, she said. If a life-threatening infection occurs and the bacteria is resistant to antibiotics, there may be a huge problem.

Patient expectations are a major cause of the over-prescription of antibiotics, Ciesielski said. Patients may expect antibiotics for viral illnesses, such as the common cold, based on previous experiences, but antibiotics are rarely effective in these cases.

"Changing a patient's expectations is very difficult," Ciesielski said.

The health center is making an effort to help patients understand that antibiotics should be used very carefully and only for specific indications.

Some alternatives to the prescription of antibiotics include decongestants, cold medicines, rest and plenty of fluids. "A lot of it is common sense stuff," Ciesielski said.

Ciesielski and Scurlock said they are planning to present these recommendations to the Pacific Coast College Health Administration in the near future.

percent of patients diagnosed with upper-respiratory infections get antibiotics, Ciesielski said. Ninety-eight percent of these infections are caused by viruses that are not affected by antibiotics. This over-prescription of antibiotics is a major cause of increased bacterial resistance, she said.

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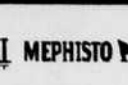
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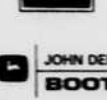
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