Book review: Responsible use of medicines – A layman’s handbook

Dear Editor,

Responsible self-medication has been recommended by various organizations including the World Health Organization as a means to reduce the cost of medicine therapy and improve effectiveness. Modern humans consume medicine regularly for a variety of conditions including both acute and chronic diseases. The medicines could either be prescribed by a healthcare practitioner or purchased from a pharmacy or other outlets without a prescription. Recently, the Indian Pharmaceutical Association and the Pharmacy Council of India have published a book dealing with the responsible use of medicines. The well-produced book is divided into 21 chapters.

The first chapter provides basic information about medicines. The various steps involved in developing a medicine are outlined. The various systems of medicine practiced in India are the focus of the second chapter. The legal language used in this chapter for citing various laws dealing with food supplements may be difficult for a general reader to understand. The diagrammatic explanation of drug labels in chapter 3 will be very useful. Patient package inserts should be promoted, and pharmacies should create ancillary labels for dispensed medicine and have trained pharmacy staff available to counsel patients. A major problem in India could be that medicines from complementary systems of medicine are freely available without a prescription and could cause adverse reactions and other problems in patients. The diagrams in this book are well designed and informative. The language in some places, however, tends toward the technical and may be difficult for laypersons.

The chapter about the pharmacist provides valuable information about this often misunderstood health professional. The chapter providing advice regarding issues to be considered while purchasing medicines will be very useful. A problem with accessing information is that the book does not mention the chapter number and title at the top/bottom of the page. The book also does not have an index. The boxes and tables provide simple, high-quality information. Chapter 8 provides useful tips for storing medicines. The chapters on self-medication and understanding your medicines are well written. The compliance aids mentioned in chapter 12 will be advantageous to patients. Being associated with pharmacovigilance programs, we found the chapter on adverse effects of medicines to be of special interest. The section on whether to take a medicine with food or before food provides very useful information. The chapter on drug advertisements could have been in greater detail as misleading, and substandard advertisements are common in developing nations.

The advice regarding the use of specific medicines in children will be useful to parents. The chapters on medicine use in the elderly and during pregnancy and lactation are well written. The chapter on dosage forms could have used better and more explanatory diagrams and pictures in certain places but provides valuable information which is not usually available to the public. The step-by-step directions on using various dosage forms are simple and easy to understand. The book ends with a list of some useful healthcare websites for accessing more information. A brief one or two sentence description of each of these sites would have been useful.

This book is freely available online and will be useful to the public in India and other developing countries to use medicines responsibly. The book will also be of interest to community pharmacists in developing countries. This is a good initiative from the organizations and authors, which requires appreciation and credit.


Financial support and sponsorship
Nil.

Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

P. Ravi Shankar, Subish Palaian

Department of Pharmacology, Xavier University School of Medicine, Oranjestad, Aruba, †Department of Pharmacy Practice, Gulf Medical University, Ajman, United Arab Emirates
Dear Editor,

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR), a growing global problem, has attracted a lot of attention recently. Recently, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom commissioned a review on the subject with the support of both the United Kingdom government and the Wellcome Trust.

The report of the review team is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the problem and highlights why tackling it is essential. The second chapter focuses on preserving the power of existing antimicrobials by reducing their demand while the third chapter deals with increasing the supply of new antimicrobials. The fourth chapter focuses on paying for tackling AMR while the fifth chapter concentrates on ideas for implementation and the next steps.

The executive summary provides an excellent overview of the review. Among the steps to reduce demand for antimicrobials mentioned are a massive global awareness campaign, improving hygiene and preventing the spread of infection, reducing unnecessary antibiotic use in agriculture, improving global surveillance of AMR and antimicrobial consumption, promoting new and rapid diagnostic tests, promoting development and use of vaccines and alternatives, and improving the numbers, pay and recognition of people working in infectious diseases.

The report’s suggestions to increase the number of new antimicrobials are to create a global innovation fund to support research and better incentives to develop antimicrobials. The tenth recommendation which the authors consider very essential for the success of the other interventions is to create a global coalition to fight AMR.

According to the report, AMR accounts for around 700,000 deaths every year and the figure is expected to rise to 10 million by the year 2050. The report highlights the fact that investment in antimicrobials is not attractive and only about 5% of the pharmaceutical investment was in this area. Improper sanitation is a major factor behind infectious diseases, and through case studies, the report highlights how improved sanitation can reduce cases of diarrhea.

The review highlights gaps in AMR surveillance, especially in developing countries, and the need to develop systems to address gaps in knowledge. The report highlights the problem of unnecessary use of antibiotics and mentions how out of the 40 million persons given antibiotics for respiratory issues in the United States, 27 million persons get antibiotics unnecessarily. Rapid diagnostic tests would help in identifying the microorganism and its sensitivity pattern more quickly and will ensure that the correct treatment is provided faster.

Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS are two important diseases where AMR is an increasing problem with an urgent requirement for newer antimicrobials. Excellent and well-designed tables and figures improve the readability of the book. The book mentions how if not tackled, AMR could result in a death toll of one person every three seconds by 2050. The summary list of recommendations at the end will be very useful to readers. This well-produced and designed book will be of interest to all interested in the problem of AMR.

About the book
Jim O’ Neill (chair). The review on antimicrobial resistance. Tackling drug-resistant infections globally:

How to cite this article: Shankar PR, Palaian S. Book review: Responsible use of medicines - A layman’s handbook. Arch Pharma Pract 2016;7:109-10.