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Combating Drug-Resistant Infections: Stewardship, Diagnostics, New Therapies

Peter Njoroge*

Department of Global Infectious Diseases, Nairobi Medical University, Nairobi, Kenya

Introduction

The escalating threat of drug-resistant infections necessitates a robust and multifaceted approach to clinical management and therapeutic development. Emerging and current clinical strategies are actively being explored to combat the growing challenge posed by antimicrobial resistance (AMR), a phenomenon that undermines the efficacy of essential medicines and poses a significant public health crisis worldwide. This article delves into the critical role of antimicrobial stewardship, advanced diagnostic techniques, and the development of novel therapeutic agents in the fight against drug-resistant pathogens. It highlights the imperative for a coordinated, multidisciplinary effort involving clinicians, microbiologists, and public health officials to effectively manage and curtail the spread of resistance. Key insights underscore the increasing importance of rapid diagnostic tests, which are crucial for enabling timely and accurate treatment selection, thereby optimizing antimicrobial use and improving patient outcomes. The integration of these diagnostics into routine clinical practice is a central focus for enhancing infection control and therapeutic efficacy. Furthermore, the exploration of innovative therapeutic modalities, such as phage therapy and combination therapies, is gaining momentum. These approaches hold promise as alternative or adjunct treatments for infections that are refractory to conventional antibiotics, offering new avenues for managing multidrug-resistant (MDR) pathogens. The diagnostic landscape for drug-resistant bacteria is undergoing rapid evolution, with significant advancements in molecular diagnostics, including PCR-based assays and next-generation sequencing. These technologies facilitate faster identification of resistant pathogens and their underlying resistance mechanisms, paving the way for more targeted interventions. Early and accurate diagnosis is paramount for guiding appropriate antimicrobial therapy, preventing the overuse of broad-spectrum agents, and implementing effective infection control measures. The seamless integration of these advanced diagnostics into the fabric of routine clinical practice is a key objective in the ongoing battle against AMR. Antimicrobial stewardship programs (ASPs) are recognized as fundamental pillars in the global effort to combat antimicrobial resistance. These programs implement core components such as formulary restriction, prospective audit and feedback, and comprehensive education initiatives to promote the judicious use of antimicrobials. Successful ASP interventions are tailored to local resistance patterns and specific healthcare settings to maximize their impact. Addressing challenges in implementing ASPs, particularly in resource-limited environments, requires strategic planning and the development of context-specific solutions to overcome these barriers. Phage therapy, which involves the use of bacteriophages to treat bacterial infections, is experiencing a resurgence of interest as a viable alternative to antibiotics, especially against MDR pathogens. Its inherent specificity and self-replicating nature offer distinct advantages, though regulatory hurdles and the need for personalized approaches remain areas of active investigation. Finally, the global burden of drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB) continues to present a formidable public health challenge, demanding focused clinical management strategies. This includes the deployment of newer drug regimens, adjunct therapies, and molecular diagnostics for rapid resistance detection, alongside a strong emphasis on patient adherence to complex treatment protocols.

Description

This article explores current and emerging clinical strategies for combating drug-resistant infections, emphasizing the critical roles of antimicrobial stewardship, diagnostics, and novel therapeutic agents. It advocates for a multidisciplinary approach involving clinicians, microbiologists, and public health officials to effectively manage and curb the spread of resistance. Key insights highlight the growing importance of rapid diagnostic tests for timely treatment selection and the potential of phage therapy and combination therapies as alternative or adjunct treatments. The diagnostic landscape for drug-resistant bacteria is rapidly evolving, with advancements in molecular diagnostics such as PCR-based assays and next-generation sequencing enabling faster identification of resistant pathogens and resistance mechanisms. Early and accurate diagnosis is crucial for guiding appropriate antimicrobial therapy, preventing the overuse of broad-spectrum agents, and implementing effective infection control measures. The integration of these diagnostics into routine clinical practice is a key focus for improving patient care and public health outcomes. Antimicrobial stewardship programs (ASPs) are fundamental to combating antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Successful ASPs incorporate components like formulary restriction, prospective audit and feedback, and education. The effectiveness of ASP interventions is maximized when they are tailored to local resistance patterns and specific healthcare settings, addressing challenges in implementation, especially in resource-limited environments. Phage therapy, the use of bacteriophages to treat bacterial infections, is gaining renewed interest as an alternative to antibiotics, particularly against multidrug-resistant (MDR) pathogens. While offering advantages such as specificity and self-replication, challenges related to regulatory hurdles and the need for personalized approaches are being addressed. Promising applications are emerging for chronic and difficult-to-treat infections. The global burden of drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB) remains a significant public health challenge. Clinical management strategies for drug-resistant TB involve newer drug regimens, adjunct therapies, and molecular diagnostics for rapid resistance detection. Patient adherence to complex treatment protocols is paramount, and challenges in diagnosis, treatment, and infection control in high-burden settings require dedicated attention. Infections caused by Gram-negative bacteria, such as carbapenem-resistant Enterobacterales (CRE) and *Acinetobacter baumannii*, pose a severe threat due to limited therapeutic options. Clinical

management focuses on combination therapies and the judicious use of last-resort antibiotics, with a critical emphasis on infection prevention and control measures in healthcare facilities to prevent outbreaks. The development of new antimicrobial agents is essential to stay ahead of evolving resistance. An overview of novel antibiotics in development, targeting new mechanisms of action or existing targets in novel ways, highlights the challenges in drug discovery and development. Public-private partnerships are crucial for accelerating innovation and bringing promising emerging classes of antibiotics to clinical use. Fungal infections, particularly those caused by azole-resistant *Candida auris*, are a growing concern. Clinical strategies for managing invasive fungal infections involve antifungal stewardship, diagnostic methods, and emerging antifungal agents. Enhanced surveillance and infection control are vital to prevent the spread of resistant fungi in healthcare settings. Global AMR initiatives require coordinated efforts and face challenges in implementation across diverse healthcare systems. One Health approaches, integrating human, animal, and environmental health, are crucial for addressing the complex drivers of AMR. Strengthened surveillance, research, and policy development are urgently needed. Patient-centered care is crucial for successful treatment of drug-resistant infections. Patient education, adherence support, and shared decision-making improve outcomes, especially for patients with chronic or complex resistant infections. A holistic approach that considers the patient's experience and needs is advocated for better management of these challenging conditions.

Conclusion

This collection of research addresses the multifaceted challenge of drug-resistant infections. Key themes include the essential roles of antimicrobial stewardship programs (ASPs) and rapid diagnostic tools in optimizing treatment and preventing resistance. Novel therapeutic approaches such as phage therapy and new antimicrobial agents are being developed as alternatives to conventional antibiotics. The review also covers the management of specific resistant pathogens, including drug-resistant tuberculosis, carbapenem-resistant Gram-negative bacteria, and drug-resistant fungi. Strategies for global coordination and patient-centered care are highlighted as crucial for effective control of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Address for Correspondence: Peter, Njoroge, Department of Global Infectious Diseases, Nairobi Medical University, Nairobi, Kenya, E-mail: p.njoroge@nmu.ke

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