



The UK Is Not Investing Enough In Research Into Multi-Drug Resistant Infections, Say Researchers



Study of funding awarded to antimicrobial resistance research projects in the UK calls for political leadership and sustained and targeted spending.

Although emergence of antimicrobial resistance severely threatens our future ability to treat many infections, the UK infection-research spend targeting this important area is still unacceptably small, say a team of researchers led by Michael Head of UCL (University College London). Their study is published online today in the *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy*.

This study is the first systematic analysis of research funding for infectious disease research, and for antimicrobial resistance, in the UK between 1997 and 2010.

There were 6,165 studies identified that were funded during the 14 year period, covering all infectious disease research, representing a total investment of £2.6 billion. Of those studies, 337 studies were funded for antimicrobial resistance research, comprising 5.5% of total infectious disease research projects. These were awarded £102 million; only 3.9% of the total spend, with a median award of approximately £120,000. Thirty-four per cent (£34.8million) of the total funding for antimicrobial resistance was related to global health.

Michael G. Head, corresponding author for the study, said: “The study showed that antimicrobial resistance desperately needs to be a priority topic for funders and policymakers, not just in the UK but worldwide. The National Institute for Health Research demonstrates a welcome UK commitment to this area via a themed research funding call, and the UK Government UK Five Year Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy 2013-2018 published on 10 September 2013, but it is important that organisations globally follow suit with intentions to invest in high quality research. This is very much an international problem.”

All the studies included in this project were either publically or charitably funded; no privately funded studies were included due to the limited data publically available about them.

Professor Rifat Atun from Imperial College London, one of the authors of the paper, said “Antimicrobial resistance is rising globally and in the UK at an alarming rate. Failure to invest in antimicrobial research means we are poorly prepared to manage the rising drug resistant infections with major health and economic

consequences. Time is ripe for strong leadership to ensure sustained and targeted funding for global and UK-level action.”

The study highlights drug-resistant tuberculosis as an example of a growing problem, with the World Health Organization estimating 630,000 cases worldwide. This and other multi-drug resistant bacteria such as *E. coli*, are areas of potentially the greatest future burden. Hence, “there is a compelling case for increased funding for antimicrobial resistance research, particularly in disciplines such as epidemiology, modelling, economics, policy, and behavioural research,” say the authors.

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