



Oral health and gastrointestinal diseases in the context of Antimicrobial Resistance

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Good afternoon and congratulations to the European Association for Educational and Preventive Health in Epigenetics (AESEP) led by Dr. Paula Mouta, for also organizing this year the Portuguese celebration of the European Patients' Rights Day. And thanks a lot for the kind invitation, it is the third time in a row that I have the privilege to join the initiative.

As you know, the European Patients' Rights Day was launched by my organization in 2007 and then recognized by the EU Institutions and other relevant stakeholders across Europe as a fixed appointment to better highlight the huge importance of the patients' rights, starting from the ones established in the European Charter of Patients' Rights, a milestone for those who work in advocacy for healthcare at the national and European level, Charter that was drafted in 2002 with the direct involvement of Patients' Advocacy Groups from many European countries.

Each year the theme of the European Patients' Rights Day is adapted to the emerging needs of the public health scenario, and at the EU level the celebration of the XVII Edition will focus on the issue

of Advanced Therapy Medicinal Products, related to at least to the following patients' rights recognized by the above mentioned European Charter of Patients' Rights: the patients' right to access to care, the patients' right to personalized treatment, the patients' right to Innovation and the patients' right to Information. The costs of this technology are high so that access by patients is often hindered by public health budget limits: how to combine the above-mentioned patients' rights in this new challenging context, characterized by health and humanitarian emergencies (fighting the pandemic and the war in Ukraine above all) with inevitable repercussions also on the financial resources of the countries of the European Union? What about the situation across Europe? What about the situation in Portugal? I hope we can meet you soon in person because I need to know much more about it.

Meantime, at the country level, I have appreciated a lot the focus of the Portuguese celebration of the European Patients' Rights Day, and I look forward to hearing more about it.

From my perspective, I'd like to invite you to reflect the topic of oral health and gastrointestinal diseases in the context of Antimicrobial Resistance.

Coming from Italy, please let me remember that before the pandemic, the phenomenon caused about 33,000 deaths in Europe each year from infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria¹: of these, more than 10,000, one-third of the total, occur in Italy. This is the sad record held by my country, which tops the continental rankings for the number of deaths linked to antimicrobial resistance, according to a report published by the Italian National Health Institute (Istituto Superiore di Sanità) on the occasion of the annual 2019 World Antimicrobial Awareness Week².

According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), in 2019 the risk - in Italy - of contracting infections during a hospitalization was about 6%. On an absolute level we are talking about 530 thousand cases each year, data that put Italy in last place among all countries in Europe³.

¹ Quotidiano Sanità: Antimicrobial resistance, draft Plan expected in 2021. 40 mln euro funding each year. The announcement at Camerae Sanitatis, October 2021 (IT language). www.quotidianosanita.it/studi-e-analisi/articolo.php?articolo_id=99360

² Il Fatto Quotidiano: "Antibiotic resistance, ISS: "Italy first among EU countries in number of deaths"", November 2019 (IT language). www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/11/19/antibiotico-resistenza-iss-italia-prima-tra-i-paesi-dellue-per-numero-di-morti/5571058/

³ Quotidiano Sanità: Antimicrobial resistance, draft Plan expected in 2021. 40 mln euro funding each year. The announcement at Camerae Sanitatis, October 2021 (IT language). www.quotidianosanita.it/studi-e-analisi/articolo.php?articolo_id=99360

To all this should be added that antibiotic consumption in Italy is higher than the European average (both at the territorial and hospital level, especially in the age groups between 2 and 5 years old, and over 85 years old) and that, above all, in my country antibiotics are inappropriately prescribed in a quarter of cases, according to the 2020 National Report on Antibiotic Use in Italy, edited by the Italian Medicines Agency (AIFA)⁴.

Generally speaking, we are talking about one of the ten most urgent threats for Global Health⁵ but totally underestimated among the populations; more impactful than car accidents⁶ but almost ignored by the media. Interlinked with the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic⁷ but not enough prioritized in the EU and National public health policies. The world is losing its most powerful tool in healthcare, antibiotics, and in the meantime, research is still waiting for EU incentive mechanisms as well as an overall strategy to integrate the development of - and access to - affordable and of quality antimicrobials.

Despite the fight against Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) requires policies focused on the prevention and extension of vaccinations, the health expenditure for prevention programmes is the “Cinderella” of the public health budget, and in several countries across the world the National Plan on AMR is still missing or expired.

Patient engagement efforts on increasing awareness on AMR are not accompanied by more widespread initiatives targeted to citizens and consumers: how do we behave at the supermarket with regards to foods produced “without any use of antibiotics”?

These are some of the paradoxes on AMR that we still need to address, and justify the commitment of [Active Citizenship Network](#) (ACN), the European branch of the Italian NGO [Cittadinanzattiva](#), established in 1978 to promote citizens' activism for the protection of rights, the care of common goods, the support for people in conditions of weakness.

The year 2025 will mark 10 years since the adoption of the WHO Global Action Plan against AMR⁸, and despite the progress made to date, there is still a need to initiate concrete and effective actions to eradicate this phenomenon, which is still too little widespread in the collective consciousness, as

⁴ Italian Medicines Agency (AIFA): 2020 National Report on Antibiotic Use in Italy (IT language). www.aifa.gov.it/documents/20142/1664282/Rapporto_Antibiotici_2020.pdf

⁵ www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/ten-threats-to-global-health-in-2019.

⁶ Road accidents: 20,000 fatalities in Europe in 2021 (IT language). [www.aci.it/archivio-notizie/notizia.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=2555&cHash=3ea251c1c72893be884adc50ab8267df#:~:text=Nel%202021%2C%20nell%27Unione%20Europea,Transport%20Safety%20Council%20\(ETSC\)%20](http://www.aci.it/archivio-notizie/notizia.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=2555&cHash=3ea251c1c72893be884adc50ab8267df#:~:text=Nel%202021%2C%20nell%27Unione%20Europea,Transport%20Safety%20Council%20(ETSC)%20)

⁷ <https://iris.paho.org/handle/10665.2/55864>

⁸ WHO Global Action Plan against AMR. www.who.int/publications-detail-redirect/9789241509763.

already said: it is no coincidence that some experts label it with the name "silent tsunami"⁹, while others speak of a "neglected pandemic"¹⁰, and also this is another key message that should not be overlooked, and a more than valid reason to be daily engaged in the fights against AMR, and not only during the World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (WAAW) promoted by World Health Organisation¹¹.

Appropriate antibiotic use is everybody's business, if we want to preserve the antibiotics and other antimicrobials effective for as many patients as possible, for as long as possible.

All we are aware that "One Health Approach" is planned, as well as multi-stakeholder actions are required and the collaboration is a key.

According to me, to go further aiming higher, we need to involve as much as possible the number of the intermediate bodies of the society as well as to recognize - in support of initiatives, both institutional and non-institutional, to counter AMR - the active role of PAGs & citizen organization dealing with health as our main common good to be safeguarded.

I hope and I am sure we can strengthen cooperation also in this field.

I wish all of you a great national celebration of the European Patients' Rights Day.

Thank you for your attention and greetings from Rome, Italy.

Mariano Votta

⁹ The silent tsunami: stemming the tide of AMR in the Covid-era. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ak8RzzFFNCE&ab_channel=PublicPolicyProjects

¹⁰ Infezioni Obiettivo Zero: "The neglected pandemic of antimicrobial resistance", February 2022 (IT language). www.infezioniobiettivozero.info/10-antibiotico-resistenza/139-pandemia-trascurata-antimicrobico-resistenza-ars-2022

¹¹ World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (WAAW) runs in 2022 from 18 to November 24th. www.who.int/campaigns/world-antimicrobial-awareness-week/2022