

Antimicrobial resistance

ICN Position:

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is very concerned with the widespread use of antimicrobial agents and the increasing global resistance, which is now a major public health problem. ICN calls for responsible prescribing and regulation and together with its member national nurses associations will:

- Work in partnership with consumers, physicians, pharmacists, veterinarians and others to prevent antimicrobial resistance, including establishing Codes of Practice for the use of antimicrobials.
- Lobby governments for policies regulating the licensing, distribution, and sale of antimicrobial agents.
- Collaborate with nursing education systems to address antimicrobial resistance at basic and continuing education levels.
- Provide patient and public education about the determinants of antimicrobial resistance and preventive measures such as adherence to treatment, inadequate dosing and counterfeit medicines.
- Support infection control policies and practices in health care settings that aim to prevent nosocomial infections.
- Ensure nurses and nursing organisations are part of national strategies for preventing antimicrobial resistance.
- Lobby to prohibit use as animal food additives of any antimicrobial agents used by humans.

Background

Nurses can play a key role in reducing antimicrobial resistance. Antimicrobial resistance is a result of poor practices such as poor adherence by patients, inadequate dosing, a substandard medicines or use of antimicrobials in animals and poultry for growth promotion or prophylaxis.

Antimicrobials were effective in control of many infectious diseases in the past. However, today many microbes¹ are becoming resistant to antimicrobials and our ability to fight disease is under threat. As a result there is re-emergence of old diseases, such as malaria and tuberculosis, and resistance in “new” diseases, such as HIV/AIDS. Nurses are key health professionals in administering antimicrobials and monitoring their effect.

The consequences of microbial resistance include prolonged illness, spread of resistant microbes, high health care cost and preventable deaths. Spread of resistant microbes is facilitated by factors such as urbanization with overcrowding and poor sanitation, environmental degradation, demographic changes with an ageing population, new diseases such as HIV/AIDS and growth in global trade and travel.

¹ Microbes denoted the collective term for bacteria, fungi, parasites, and viruses.

Adopted in 2004

Related ICN Positions:

- Counterfeit medicines
- Management of nursing and health care services
- Participation of nurses in health services decision-making and policy development
- Patient safety
- Health information: protecting patient rights
- Informed patients

Related ICN Publications:

- Fact Sheet: Antimicrobial Resistance: World Health Professions Alliance.
- TB Guidelines for Nurses in the Care and Control of Tuberculosis and Multidrug Resistant Tuberculosis (2004)

The International Council of Nurses is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.