MedTech Europe
from diagnosis to cure

We have the tools to tackle AMR –let's use them

by Serge Bernasconi

The medical technology industry can help fight AMR by preventing infections, improving diagnosis and avoiding misuse of antimicrobial agents

Medical technologies play a key role in our health systems. From diagnosis to cure, the sector develops smart new tests and devices that help us live longer, healthier lives.

With over 500,000 products on the market – and a track record for innovation – Europe's 26,000 Medtech companies stand ready to join the fight against antimicrobial resistance (AMR). In Europe, the industry is powered by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that make up 95% companies working to bring value to the health system.

When we look at the biggest challenges we face, antimicrobial resistance stands out as an issue that threatens the sustainability of our health systems. The good news is that we already have tools that can fuel the fightback against AMR throughout the patient pathway.

Let's start with prevention. Safer, minimally-invasive surgery and accelerated healing, along with antibacterial-coated implants, sutures and dressings, limit the risk of hospital-acquired infection. By screening patients before and during hospitalisation – and in the community setting – we can reduce the exposure of patients and health workers to multidrug resistant organisms.

Quick and accurate diagnostics also play a key role in reducing the inappropriate use of antibiotics. By determining the cause of an illness, we can avoid the prescription of antibiotics to treat viral infections. Tests can also predict how well a patient will respond to certain treatments, guiding doctors' prescribing choice and avoiding further increase in resistance.

Information technology can also play a role. Today's eHealth and mHealth tools give health systems the power to track antimicrobial resistance and to monitor patient compliance with treatment.

In short, medical technologies have already developed products and services that reduce the risk of infection, curb the overuse of antibiotics, and control the spread of resistant organisms in hospitals and in the community.

The value of these technologies is well understood but uptake remains a challenge. We need to do more together to empower patients and give health professionals the time and tools to focus on AMR prevention. This requires culture change, allowing for transparency, and dedicated teams with a mandate to address AMR. It may also mean rethinking financial incentives for general practitioners to support evidence-based treatment informed by diagnostic technologies.

And, if we are to incentivise medical technology companies, large and small, to dream up new solutions to our shared challenges, we need to think hard about the business models for enhancing access to the fruits of their innovation.

The challenge is immense but I am confident that, together, we can rise to it.