Correspondence

Create Allies, IDSA Stewardship Commitments Should Prioritize Health Professions Learners

TO THE EDITOR—We would like to congratulate the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) for its work at the recent national antimicrobial stewardship forum at the White House on 2 June 2015 and for releasing its statement on IDSA stewardship commitments [1, 2]. We would like to propose an additional area of focus to the strategic plan that emphasizes the critical importance of providing stewardship education to our health professions learners (medical, pharmacy, dental, and nursing students as well as postgraduate trainees).

We believe that antimicrobial stewardship should be taught concurrently with the foundational learning of microorganisms and antimicrobials rather than waiting until habits are already established at later stages of the practitioner’s career. Early education integrates stewardship into students’ core understanding of how we diagnose and treat infections and will be more likely to lead to long-term incorporation of these principles into future prescribing practices. Furthermore, early instruction of these learners in antimicrobial stewardship can potentially lead to hundreds of new allies annually who can chaperone their elder counterparts into an era of more appropriate antibiotic use. These students should be looked on not just as passive learners but as potential partners in change throughout the healthcare field.

Unfortunately, there is currently a deficiency in the quantity and quality of stewardship education for health professions learners at all levels of their education. A recent survey of 104 microbiology course directors at US medical schools revealed that only 66% of schools are incorporating antimicrobial stewardship into their curriculum [3]. A study of fourth-year medical students at 4 US medical schools revealed that 90% of respondents would like more education on appropriate antimicrobial use and scored a mean of 51% on their knowledge on this topic [4]. Similarly, a survey of 579 pharmacy students at 12 US pharmacy schools found that 89% of students desired more education on appropriate antimicrobial use, with a comparable performance on a test of knowledge [5]. A study of medical students in Europe revealed similar results [6].

As infectious disease practitioners, we must lead the development of stewardship curriculum for these learners. We recommend that IDSA, the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America, the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, and other organizations committed to improving stewardship work with thought leaders and educators to identify key curricular components and high-quality educational methods that can be broadly disseminated. These efforts can build on curricular products, such as those developed by a collaborative effort between the Centers for Disease Control, the Association of American Medical Colleges, and Wake Forest School of Medicine [7]. Furthermore, this is an opportunity for the IDSA to capitalize on the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education’s recent commitment to antimicrobial stewardship by using its organizational structure to disseminate information to their stakeholders and training programs [8]. We look forward to working with our IDSA colleagues and other interested groups to help fashion our next generation of health professionals into skilled antimicrobial stewards by supporting the development and dissemination of high-quality educational curricula.

Note

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