



Dr David McCoy
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Gwyn Jones
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Dear Mr Jones,

Thank you for your letter of 12th December, regarding the letter that appeared in the Daily Telegraph on 14th November.

Our letter had no intention of pointing the finger at the animal sector as we also see the importance of taking a collaborative ‘One Health’ approach to antimicrobial resistance. Instead, it was aimed at encouraging the government to support and adopt policies that have been voted through the European Parliament and which are due to be discussed in a trialogue next year.

While our letter called for a UK-wide ban on ‘routine preventative mass medication’, it did not call for a ban on all forms of preventative antibiotic use, nor for a blanket ban on group medication. We accept that there are situations where the preventative use of antibiotics for treating individual animals is appropriate (e.g. for surgery), and that there are situations where metaphylactic group treatment (where disease has been diagnosed in at least one animal) may be warranted. Our letter only called for a ban on *routine* antibiotic use in farming, especially purely prophylactic group treatments (where no disease has been diagnosed).

The full letter is available on the website of the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics [1] and also calls for restrictions on the use of the critically important antibiotics.

Medact welcomes the efforts made by the UK farming industry, and in particular the poultry industry, to reduce antibiotic use. Less than two weeks after our letter appeared in the Daily Telegraph, the British Poultry Council announced that all BPC poultry companies had stopped prophylactic use during 2016 [2]. This means that all group treatments in BPC poultry are now either therapeutic or metaphylactic, which is consistent with what we were calling for in the Daily Telegraph letter.

The BPC has also announced that use of fluoroquinolone antibiotics, a critically important antibiotic, in chickens and ducks has now ceased.

Most farm antibiotic use in the UK occurs in the pig industry, and progress there has been slower. Although there is some evidence that the pig industry is beginning to reduce its antibiotic use, antibiotic use in 2015 in British pigs was still about 5 times higher than in Dutch pigs according to calculations by the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics, which are based on VMD and Dutch data [3]. A commitment to end to routine preventative treatments would lead to much faster progress.

Comparisons with other countries is useful, and we note the fact that antibiotic use in British poultry is now at a similar level to use in Dutch poultry, and that antibiotic use in British cattle is much lower than in Dutch cattle. However, when it comes to the use of 'critically important antibiotics' per Population Correction Unit, the veterinary use of these antibiotics is still over four times higher in the UK than in the Netherlands [4,5].

Overall we are encouraged by the positive steps that have been made in the agricultural sector. However, given the urgency required to prevent further development of antibiotic resistance, we believe that stronger measures to curb antibiotic use in both human and animal medicine are required.

We would be interested in exploring an opportunity of a visit to a farm, I am sure that the other signatories might be interested too.

Yours sincerely,



Dr David McCoy
Director, Medact

[1] <http://www.saveourantibiotics.org/news/news/letter-uks-top-medics-call-on-government-to-ban-the-routine-use-of-antibiotics-in-uk-farming/>

[2] http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/imported/transforms/content-block/UsefulDownloads_Download/FF4AB501C3314CB98F519D041F0C28CC/maire%20burnett%20british%20poultry%20council%20overview.pdf

[3] <http://www.saveourantibiotics.org/media/1768/antibiotic-use-in-the-uk-pig-sector.pdf>

[4] http://www.autoriteitdiergeesmiddelen.nl/Userfiles/Eng_rapport_AB_gebruik_2015/def-engels-rapportage-ab-gebruik-2015.pdf

[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/571146/UK-VARSS_2015.pdf