

Hospitals told to use antibiotics correctly to control superbugs

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THE NATION

ACADEMICS ARE calling on medical practitioners and the public to use antibiotics properly in order to prevent the development of drug-resistant bacteria. They have also told the public to not panic over reports of superbugs in the United States, as the diseases caused by them are still curable.

Mahidol University's Faculty of Science held a forum on the threat of antibiotics-resistant bacteria yesterday. The talks were held in response to the recent finding of a strain of E coli bacteria that has developed a resistance to the strongest antibiotic, Colistin, which is usually able to suppress superbugs.

Even as this discovery makes headlines across the world, Dr

Kamthon Malatham, head of Infectious Disease Sector Faculty of Medicine Ramathibodi Hospital, told people not to panic and that researchers should focus on preventing the development of a new strain of superbugs.

"As of now there is no strain of bacteria that can withstand all types of antibiotics, and the E-coli strain that was found in the US can still be treated with other antibiotics, so we should not be too scared of this news," Kamthon said.

However, he warned that the problem of superbugs should not be overlooked because they will continue developing and if we do nothing to control the new strains then by 2050 there will be one death from drug-resistant bacteria every three seconds in Thailand.

He explained that these super-

bugs made it difficult to treat conditions that can normally be cured easily, not to mention the rising cost of treatment and an increase in fatalities.

"The threat from superbugs is real and can cause as many as 19,000 to 45,000 deaths per year – this number is far higher than deaths caused by accidents. So what we should do is prevent such drug-resistant bugs from developing," he said. "This can be done by not using antibiotics in cases that are not bacterial infections, because that will make the bacteria in our bodies drug resistant. Also, when taking antibiotics, make sure to complete the entire course."

Soraya Chaturongakul, a lecturer at the Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Science Mahidol University, explained that bacteria evolves to survive, though

it is still unclear whether drug-resistant bugs naturally exist in nature. However, she said, it was definite that the extensive usage of antibiotics in the medical and livestock industries is a major factor behind the development of drug-resistant bugs.

"Though superbugs are becoming common, I think we can overcome them through the proper use of antibiotics. However, it is very important that people be told about the effect of the misuse of antibiotics and correct the wrong belief that antibiotics can treat any and all illnesses," Soraya said.

She also said that there should be more regulations on the purchase of antibiotics, because nowadays they can be bought without a prescription over the counter anywhere in the country.