ONE HEALTH 2018 –
A Joint Approach for Healthcare and Veterinary Professionals
20th November 2018
National Convention Centre, Dublin
Speech by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Mr Michael Creed TD
Introduction

It is a pleasure to be here this afternoon with my colleague, Minister Harris to attend this first national One Health Event for healthcare and veterinary professionals which marks European Antibiotic Awareness day and coincides with World Antibiotic Awareness Week 2018. Before I begin, let me thank all those involved in the organisation of this joint event. I would like to acknowledge the efforts and commitment of the staff in my own Department, and those in the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive, supported by the Environmental Protection Agency, who worked steadily together to ensure we had a thought provoking and informative programme today for all attendees.

Within the ‘One Health’ framework, AMR is now accepted to be a major strategic global public health risk. AMR is a challenge for all of society. The fact that humans and animals share the same environment, and are exposed to the same general families of bacteria, treated with the same suite of antibiotics, means that a lack of effective antibiotics due to AMR development is of direct relevance to human healthcare and veterinary professionals, indeed to society as a whole. Tackling AMR collectively across the three sectors, human health, animal health and the environmental sector is viewed as being critically important to achieving sustainable development. AMR can threaten the inroads made in human and animal health over the decades to treat bacterial infection. In acknowledging the complexity of the challenge, there is general agreement that AMR is best addressed under the ‘One Health’ umbrella, and hence having you all here today is hugely valuable.
The importance of AMR to the animal health sector

AMR continues to be of relevance to the animal health sector. Whilst the use of antibiotics in farm production systems directly contributes to the overall AMR debate, it is clear that veterinary practitioners as the prescribers and indeed gatekeepers of antibiotics have a key role to play to promote the responsible use of antibiotics in the animal health sector.

Antibiotics also play an important role in the maintenance of animal health and welfare. We need to ensure that farmers, horse owners and pet owners, continue to have access to effective antibiotics so that they can continue to treat their animals when outbreaks of bacterial disease occur; that they can protect their animal’s welfare, and that they can take measures to prevent the transmission of zoonotic bacteria. This will not happen if we continue to use antibiotics at the level at which they are being used currently. We will see, as we have seen in the human health sector, the development of multi-drug resistant infections that are very difficult and expensive to treat.

In this context I welcome the recent nationwide survey of Irish Farmers conducted by the IFA and APHA (Animal and Plant Health Association) which is an important step in establishing baseline views on AMR. This survey has identified a high level of awareness amongst farmers of AMR and its potential impact. 85% of farmers revealed that they are concerned about AMR and 92% of farmers identify an immediate need for greater awareness of AMR amongst all involved in agriculture.

As you know, Ireland is a major food exporter with the agri-food sector responsible for 10% of national exports, valued at approx €13.6 billion
annually. We have ambitious targets for growing these exports and with Brexit on the horizon the importance of expanding our markets has never been greater. Combined with increasing demand from more affluent and discerning customers in key world markets, we need to meet consumer expectations under several headings, not least of which is food safety.

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When I launched the National Farmed Animal Health Strategy in 2017, a key enabling principal was ‘working in partnership’; since last year’s launch of Ireland’s first ‘One Health’ national action plan on antimicrobial resistance, iNAP, we have seen how iNAP is an excellent example of embodying this spirit of working in partnership. All stakeholders have demonstrated a clear commitment to iNAP and taken visible leadership in their own area of responsibility, promoting and advancing initiatives that help to address the challenge of AMR. I wish to commend the Joint Interdepartmental AMR Consultative Committee for their oversight of the development of the first One Health Report which examines the surveillance of AMR and usage of antibiotics across the human and animal health sectors. This report, a collaborative effort by the Department of Health and my Department, has been completed recently and will be published shortly.

I would like to mention a number of new AMR policy and guidance documents developed by the iNAP animal health sector implementation committee that will be launched at this event, in particular the policy document in relation to the restricted use of Highest Priority Critically
Important Antibiotics for human health. I recognise this has required considerable investment of time and effort by the various stakeholders, and I commend them for their commitment, and collective action to address AMR. In the same vein the prudent use guidelines prepared by the farming and veterinary stakeholders and launched at this event are an excellent example of the shared responsibility principal of the National Farmed Animal Health Strategy.

‘One Health 2018’ aims to facilitate the sharing and learning of best practice amongst healthcare and veterinary professionals in relation to prescribing and use of antibiotics in human and animal health. This event embodies two keys objectives of iNAP in relation to improving knowledge and awareness of AMR, and also optimising the use of antibiotics in human and animal health.

It is an opportune time for healthcare and veterinary professionals to share learning on the opportunities and challenges encountered in relation to prescribing, use and management of antibiotics in human and animal health, including how best to support the delivery of high quality, safe and effective care whilst ensuring appropriate antimicrobial stewardship.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that attitudes and behaviours relating to antibiotic use are changing. With the increased global movement of people, food products and animals, AMR and the threat it poses to modern medicine is not something that any country can ignore.
At a societal level, all involved in the supply and use of antibiotics in every sector – human, animal, plant and environment - have a role to play in addressing this global societal challenge.

Once again I commend all stakeholders, involved in i NAP who are working towards delivering a key public good that best serves Ireland, from a social, environmental and economic perspective. I look forward to continued positive engagement by all sectors, and leadership around addressing the challenge of AMR and hope you all leave here more informed about your respective roles and responsibilities, as gatekeepers, to protect antibiotics for all our futures.

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