

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Ranking Member Kathy Castor

Hearing on "Antimicrobial Resistance: Taking on the Next Emerging Public Health Threat"

April 28, 2023

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on the urgent public health issue of antimicrobial resistance.

If we have learned any lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that we must dedicate sufficient resources to prepare for the public health threats we are aware of while also working to prepare for new and emerging health threats.

CDC's 2019 Threat Assessment Report identified 18 bacteria and fungi that are showing evidence of resistance to currently available treatments, and that trend is expected to rise.

Our government has been aware of this threat for some time, and has taken steps to address it. In 2015, for example, in accordance with an executive order issued by President Obama, the federal government released a National Action Plan for Combating Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria that outlined the framework for the federal response to this growing health threat.

While we've made some strides in preventing and treating antibiotic resistance, there is ground to regain as we emerge from three years of a pandemic that put unprecedented strains on the entire health care system and rolled back some of that progress.

The effort to combat antibiotic resistance requires a strong coordinated response involving both private and public sector stakeholders to advance new technologies, effectively collect data on incidents of antibiotic resistant infections, make resources available for hospitals and providers to practice sound antibiotic stewardship, foster scientific research on new treatments and therapies, and implement prevention measures.

At yesterday's hearing, some of the Republicans on this subcommittee expressed real skepticism about the value of pandemic research. Today, we are hearing all about the importance of addressing antimicrobial resistance, which will require a strong, supported medical and scientific workforce. While the tones of these back-to-back hearings are certainly in tension, I hope we come out of them with a better appreciation for the work of our scientific community.

Let me make an obvious but important point here—while there are many fronts on which we have to fight these very serious threats, we make no progress without consistent investment in scientific research.

That was just as true yesterday as it is today, although that may be news to some of my colleagues.

We need scientists to study these threats to help us prepare against them, and they should be able to do so free of political interference designed to malign or ban certain types of public health research.

Our job is to maintain support for and trust in the agencies that are at the forefront of a national response, like the CDC and NIH.

I'm pleased that the GAO is testifying today on its thorough report that was coincidentally completed right at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is an excellent resource to build from as we enter pandemic recovery and turn our attention to a broader array of public health threats – hopefully with a new appreciation for the importance of preparedness.

I'd also like to thank our other witnesses for being here to share their expertise from several different angles of this complex issue.

Antimicrobial resistance is a problem facing health care professionals and researchers across the health care system. But it's also important to emphasize that there are environmental and agricultural aspects contributing to the rise in resistance that we have to address as well. A multi-pronged issue calls for a multi-pronged solution.

I look forward to the discussion today and coming out of this hearing with a deeper understanding of the nature and scope of the threat posed by antimicrobial resistance so we make more informed policy to help combat it.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing. I yield back.