“Lip service” not enough to address global threat

Three hundred of Australia’s most eminent infectious disease experts will gather in Melbourne on Thursday at a summit to identify actions to slow the rapid spread of drug resistant infections in Australia. “We are concerned that the rise of antibiotic resistance puts both human and animal safety at risk. Unless we take prompt coordinated action, we could rapidly return to a pre-antibiotic era,” said Prof Ben Howden, President of the Australian Society of Antimicrobials (ASA). “The government has acknowledged the problem but isn’t implementing effective solutions. Australia is falling behind other developed countries in seriously addressing this issue,” he said.

Thursday’s summit is expected to demand the urgent establishment of a coordinating centre that brings both human and animal health issues under one roof. “The use of antibiotics in veterinary practice and food production here and overseas is having an impact on human and animal health,” said Prof Cheryl Jones, President of the Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases (ASID). “Until now, animal and human health issues have been addressed separately, resulting in patchy and uncoordinated responses. “We don’t have precise information about the prescription of antibiotics in the community by GPs; nor about use in livestock industries or veterinary practices. We don’t even have a comprehensive list of superbugs present in Australian hospitals, let alone in the community or in animals,” she said. “Until we know exactly what is happening, we can’t even start to address the problem that the UN refers to as “a global threat”.

“It's time we agreed what to do and got to work,” said Jones.

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