

July 1, 2010

The Honorable Betty Sutton
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Sutton,

As health care professionals we have an obligation to advocate for policies that are necessary to maintain public health. Effective antibiotics are critical to human health, and we cannot afford to lose the efficacy of one antibiotic drug, let alone entire categories of drugs. Currently, we are seeing major increases in antibiotic-resistant bacterial infections, and scientists agree that a major contributing factor to this imminent health care crisis is routine misuse of human antibiotics in industrial animal production.

The majority of all antibiotics used in the U.S. are given to livestock and poultry on factory farms not to sick animals, but for weight gain and disease prevention in the crowded, unsanitary conditions that exist on many factory farms. In fact, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, up to 70 percent of these critically important drugs are being given to animals for purposes other than treating disease. There are the same drugs or classes of drugs used commonly in human medicine – penicillins, tetracyclines, sulfonamides, and more.

Often these human antibiotics are administered to entire herds or flocks at low doses in daily feed or water for the animals' entire lives. This practice raises grave concerns about a looming health care crisis. Prolonged bacterial exposure to low doses of antibiotics increases resistance to those drugs and makes the bacteria harder to kill.

Because people can pick up drug-resistant bacteria by eating or handling contaminated meat, this serious health risk reaches consumers in their homes, and even in restaurants. Resistant bacteria also can be contracted through contact with soil and water that has been polluted with animal farm waste, or with air that has been emitted from factory farms, or by eating crops that have been fertilized with contaminated manure.

The problem of resistance grows quickly from there. Bacteria can transfer resistance genes easily to each other, meaning bacteria resistant to some drugs used in food animals can become resistant to other similar drugs, or whole classes of drugs.

We work closely with patients and patient advocacy groups to ensure antibiotics are not given without appropriate justification, yet there are minimal federal regulations in place to prevent the overuse of antibiotics in industrial farming.

We strongly encourage you to support the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act of 2009 (PAMTA). The bill was reintroduced in March 2009 by Representative Louise Slaughter in the U.S. House (HR.1549) and by Senator Kennedy in the Senate (S.619). This legislation would limit the misuse of important human antibiotics in food animal production.

Passage of the PAMTA legislation will close a huge loophole in the efforts to stop further development of antibiotic resistant germs. It's time to act before our medications lose even more of their potency and we urge you to show leadership by supporting this bill.

Sincerely,

Jan Ruma, Vice President
Hospital Council of Northwest Ohio
3231 Central Park West Drive Ste 200
Toledo, Ohio 43617

Timothy Buckley, Ph.D., School of Public Health
The Ohio State University
320 West 10th Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43210

Daniel Raub, Health Commissioner
Medina County Combined General Health District
4800 Ledgewood Drive
Medina, Ohio 44256

Bill Hardy, Executive Director
AIDS Resource Center Ohio
15 West Fourth Street, Suite 200
Dayton, Ohio 45402

Peggy Anderson, Interim President & CEO
Columbus AIDS Taskforce
1751 East Long Street
Columbus, Ohio 43203

Michael Stark, M.D., President
The Academy of Medicine of Toledo and Lucas County
4428 Secor Road
Toledo, Ohio 43623

Lee Walton, Executive Director
The Academy of Medicine of Toledo and Lucas County
4428 Secor Road
Toledo, Ohio 43623

Jon F. Wills, Executive Director
Ohio Osteopathic Association
53 West Third Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43201

J. Kevin Sullivan
Ohio AIDS Coalition
48 South Whittier Street
Columbus, Ohio 43206

Jason Chao, M.D., M.S.
Professor of Family Medicine, Education Division Director
Case Western Reserve University and University Hospitals Case Medical Center
Cleveland, Ohio 44106

Matthew Stefanak, Health Commissioner
Mahoning County General Health District
50 Westchester Drive
Youngstown, Ohio 44515

Jan Lanier, Deputy Executive Director
Ohio Nurses Association
4000 East Main Street
Columbus, Ohio 43213

David Winfough, M.D.
Professor of Family Medicine, Education Division Director
Middletown City Health District
One Donham Plaza
Middleton, Ohio 45042

John Moritz, Executive Director
Viola Startzman Free Clinic
1874 Cleveland Road
Wooster, Ohio 44691

Marvin Rubin, DPM
Area Office on Aging of Northwestern
Ohio, Inc.
2155 Arlington Road
Toledo, Ohio 43609

Deborah Fancher
Public Health Nurse
Franklin County Board of Health
280 E. Broad Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Wendy Redmond, MD
City Health Commissioner
Coshocton City Health Department
400 Browns Lane
Coshocton, Ohio 43812

Robert Curran, MD
Lake County General Health District
33 Mill Street
Painesville Ohio, 44077

Sam Halassa
Akron Health Department
177 S. Broadway Street
Akron, Ohio 44308

Anne Davy, RN
Marion County, Ohio

John McLeod, RS, MPH
Director
Cuyahoga County Board of Health
5550 Venture Road
Cleveland, Ohio 44130

Chris Eady
Hamilton County, Ohio