

AMR Industry Alliance Finds Exodus of Scientific Talent Threatens Progress Toward Antimicrobial Global Health Threat

Despite its growing death toll, scientific 'brain drain' compounds efforts to tackle antimicrobial resistance.

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*James Anderson, Board Chair
of the AMR Industry Alliance*

has identified an exodus of scientific researchers with expertise in antimicrobials as a growing barrier to developing the new antibiotics needed to tackle the rise in antimicrobial resistance. The study estimates that there are just 3,000 active researchers focused on developing new antibiotics globally.

The report is one of the first of its kind to look at the experience of researchers working in this field, tracking the impact that underinvestment in antimicrobial research is

having on the retention of scientists. The study, [“Leaving the Lab: Tracking the Decline in AMR R&D Professionals,”](#) has been published by the AMR Industry Alliance, one of the largest private sector coalitions dedicated to combatting antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

James Anderson, Board Chair of the AMR Industry Alliance, underlined the importance of the analysis, stating that, “This analysis sounds an alarm as the scientists with the skills and experience to develop the next generation of antibiotics – which we need to treat resistant infections – are leaving for other research areas. There aren’t many researchers in the world who have successfully developed an innovative antibiotic and the decline seen in this report adds urgency to the well-recognized need for increased investment in AMR. Funding from groups such as CARB-X and the AMR Action Fund helps attract and retain scientific experts in antibiotic R&D, but the ecosystem will only be economically sustainable when governments introduce incentives such as the PASTEUR Act.”

Despite action like the upcoming UNGA High-Level Meeting on AMR later this year, the AMR “brain drain” phenomenon may complicate every part of the drug development process, from basic discovery research through clinical testing all the way up to regulatory approval, as robust expertise is needed within agencies like FDA and EMA to ensure judicious safety and efficacy

reviews of all new antimicrobials.

The AMR Industry Alliance conducted a review of publicly available data on the state of AMR research and development talent. It found that:

- The AMR R&D workforce is limited and declining. It estimates approximately 3,000 AMR researchers currently active in the world, compared to as many as 46,000 for cancer and 5,000 for HIV/AIDS.

- AMR research output is many times lower than fields like cancer and HIV/AIDS. In 2022, there were 35 times more papers published on cancer than priority bacteria, with 20 times more patents awarded for cancer than antibiotics.

- The AMR R&D workforce has significantly declined over the past two decades. The total number of authors on all AMR publications declined from a high of 3,599 in 1995 to just 1,827 in 2020.

The report finds that major pharmaceutical companies and smaller biotech companies alike have struggled with a lack of market incentives, while private investors and governments have directed funds to other disease areas. This disturbing trend has been exacerbated by the broken market for antimicrobials, a lack of investment in the field, and loss of expertise due to job changes and retirements. To counter this, the report concludes:

- Adequate funding for push and pull incentives can play a key role in addressing low funding. If we are to meet the need for new antimicrobials, we must invest in the people who are responsible for their discovery.

- Continue catalyzing new scientists and galvanizing groundbreaking AMR research by introducing scientists to AMR, as demonstrated by organizations like ICARE and Future Leaders Against AMR.

- New investments are needed to help more physicians overcome the financial barriers to entering infectious disease – which typically costs aspiring doctors more while yielding less income.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is among the top causes of death worldwide – it is estimated to have caused 1.27 million deaths and been associated with 4.95 million deaths in 2019 alone. If unaddressed, it may cause as many as 10 million deaths every year by 2050, costing the global economy a cumulative \$100 trillion.

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