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Tom Patterson
130 Brookline Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
June 19, 2000

Food and Drug Administration
5699 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear FDA,

Enclosed is an editorial on the use of antibiotics. I agree with the editorial that the use of antibiotics in animals needs to be curbed. I hope the FDA will pursue this matter.

Sincerely,



Tom Patterson

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Losing Ground Against Microbes

Among the many things people in industrialized countries today take for granted is that we will not die of a sore throat or infected scratch from a rosebush. Effective protection provided by antibiotics, anti-malarials and other microbe-killers was not available 50 years ago, and a new report from the World Health Organization warns that if we continue current practices, such protection will not be available 50 years from now. Almost every major infectious disease is becoming resistant to available medicine, and scientists are not developing new medicines fast enough to keep up. The W.H.O. warns that we cannot count on new drugs being developed, and so must preserve the currently available antimicrobials by ending our misuse of them.

Drugs lose effectiveness because the microbes they fight become resistant. This natural process has been greatly accelerated by human misuse of medicine. In poor countries, according to the W.H.O., the biggest problem is that people underuse drugs. They cannot afford a complete course of treatment, or take weaker and cheaper counterfeit drugs. This kills off only the susceptible forms of the microbes, allowing the more resistant versions to remain and dominate.

In wealthy countries, the problem is the opposite. Drug resistance has soared because antibiotics are overprescribed, used even when they are no good at all — for example, to fight colds, which are not bacterial but viral infections against which antibiotics are useless. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that a third of the antibiotics Americans take on an outpatient basis are unnecessary. In addition, half of all antibiotics are produced for animal use, mainly to increase the growth of livestock and poultry. The resistant microbes they create can spread to humans. Even the effectiveness of vancomycin, the last line of defense in American hospitals against staph infections, could be imperiled because a vancomycin derivative is fed to animals in Europe.

Around the world, doctors are finding that diseases that were once easily cured are now stronger than their medicines. Thailand can no

longer use the three most common anti-malarial drugs. Gonorrhoea is once again life-threatening in Southeast Asia. In Russia, 1 in 10 tuberculosis patients cannot take standard TB drugs. When resistant TB spread to New York City in the early 1990's, it cost \$1 billion to contain it. In the United States, 14,000 people die each year from drug-resistant infections picked up in hospitals.

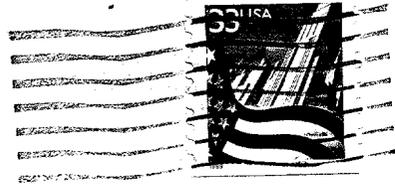
The most urgent need is more research into new antimicrobial drugs, which flagged until the mid-1990's because of complacency and because they were not considered as profitable as medicines that must be taken for long periods of time. While variations on existing drugs continue to emerge, American scientists believe that no significant new classes of drugs or vaccines will be ready for 5 or 10 years.

Antimicrobials all over the world need more controls. In the vast majority of nations, antibiotics are available without a doctor's prescription, and poor people tend to buy only one or two pills — all they can afford. Doctors and pharmacists must instruct patients when to use antibiotics, and about the importance of finishing a course of treatment. In addition, all children must be vaccinated against infectious diseases.

Developed nations must also improve their vaccination rates and drastically reduce antibiotic usage. The easiest place to start is to greatly reduce the use of antibiotics to fatten animals. The Food and Drug Administration is tightening the use of some antibiotics in animals, but it needs to go further.

Patient education is also critical. Doctors, who should know better, need to resist demands for antibiotics from patients with colds. The new antimicrobial soaps and cleaners made for household use also contribute to drug resistance by killing only weak bacteria. They should be used sparingly, as when tending to a sick person with a weak immune system. Most people alive today do not remember a world without antimicrobial agents, when the possibility of death lurked in every cough or upset stomach. If we do not reform our use of medicines, this is the world we might bequeath to our children.

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