OPEN LETTER

Surveillance and Epidemiology of Drug Resistant Infections Consortium (SEDRIC): Supporting the transition from strategy to action [version 1; referees: awaiting peer review]

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Surveillance and Epidemiology of Drug Resistant Infections Consortium (SEDRIC)

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Abstract

In recognition of the central importance of surveillance and epidemiology in the control of antimicrobial resistance and the need to strengthen surveillance at all levels, Wellcome has brought together a new international expert group SEDRIC (Surveillance and Epidemiology of Drug Resistant Infections Consortium). SEDRIC aims to advance and transform the ways of tracking, sharing and analysing rates of infection and drug resistance, burden of disease, information on antibiotic use, opportunities for preventative measures such as vaccines, and contamination of the environment. SEDRIC will strengthen the availability of information needed to monitor and track risks, including an evaluation of access to, and utility of data generated by pharma and research activities, and will support the translation of surveillance data into interventions, changes in policy and more effective practices. Ways of working will include the provision of independent scientific analysis, advocacy and expert advice to groups, such as the Wellcome Drug Resistant Infection Priority Programme. A priority for SEDRIC’s first Working Group is to review mechanisms to strengthen the generation, collection, collation and dissemination of high quality data, together with the need for creativity in the use of existing data and proxy measures, and linking to existing in-country networking infrastructure. SEDRIC
will also promote the translation of technological innovations into public health solutions.

**Keywords**
Surveillance, epidemiology, drug resistant infections, antimicrobial, SEDRIC

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Introduction

The discovery, production and global use of antimicrobial drugs represents one of the most important achievements in medical history, and has contributed significantly to a major increase in life expectancy. Antimicrobial drugs continue to save millions of lives each year, and ensuring access to quality medicines is key to continued gains in global health and development. However, widespread use of antimicrobials in humans, livestock and agriculture for health and non-health purposes in the 70 years since their commercial production has resulted in the emergence of antibiotic-resistant lineages for the majority of common human pathogens worldwide.

The emergence and spread of antibiotic resistance in the face of extensive antibiotic use was both inevitable and predictable for rapidly replicating organisms like bacteria. This is based on the knowledge that bacteria develop antimicrobial agents to compete with other microorganisms in the natural environment, and therefore produce resistance mechanisms to defend themselves. Genes encoding bacterial resistance to β-lactam, tetracycline and glycopeptide drugs have been found in ancient DNA from 30,000-year-old Beringian permafrost sediments. Humans who have never been treated with antimicrobial drugs are also colonised with bacteria that carry resistance genes, as shown by a study that detected a total of 28 different functional antibiotic resistance genes in the microbiome of uncontacted Amerindians.

A major response to rising rates of bacterial resistance to one drug was to develop new drug classes. Although a successful short-term strategy, this approach has ultimately selected new resistance patterns. Antibiotic discovery itself has faltered as the string of easy wins for developing new drugs was exhausted and many pharmaceutical companies withdrew from antibiotic discovery. The combination of rising rates of bacterial resistance to commonly used antimicrobial drugs, their continued widespread and uncontrolled use and the lack of new anti-infective therapeutic agents represents the perfect storm. Over the last 5 or so years there has been an increasing realisation of the scale of the global societal threat posed to human and animal health, agriculture, food and economic development, and the need to measure and monitor resistance using appropriate surveillance systems.

A new and broader social and political awareness is now gathering pace. This has been reflected in the G20 summit of 2016 where leaders acknowledged the gravity of the threat and the need to stimulate new drug discovery and pursue international discussions; the launch of a global action plan to tackle antimicrobial resistance at the World Health Assembly in 2015; and the United Nations High Level Meeting on antimicrobial resistance and a General Assembly declaration in 2016 endorsing the plan and committing to take action. Aligned with this, the World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) have encouraged and supported countries to develop national action plans. The WHO has also developed a Global Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (GLASS) to collect and report data on antimicrobial resistance rates aggregated at the national level and to develop international standards for surveillance to support stepwise participation by Member States over time.

This high level political strategy now requires translation into action. Although tackling the problem of antimicrobial resistance is acknowledged as being immensely complex, clarity is being increasingly provided by numerous organizations, and several recent reviews. Common themes include a stronger discovery pipeline for new antimicrobial drugs and alternatives such as vaccines; the development of new point-of-care diagnostics; increased stewardship through the appropriate therapeutic use of antimicrobial drugs in humans and veterinary medicine; and the prevention of infections. Surveillance and epidemiology are widely recognised as critical cross-cutting activities, and include mapping patterns of infection (including non-resistant infection) and the rates of drug resistant infections over time for a range of bug-drug combinations; estimation of the global burden from drug resistant infections; mapping of the quality and quantity of antibiotics used in humans, animals and agriculture; the use and opportunity for vaccine coverage for the prevention of infectious diseases; and contamination of the environment. The ideal would be a surveillance system across the totality of the ecosystem – hosts, environment and putative routes of dissemination.

SEDRIC

In recognition of the central importance of surveillance and epidemiology in the control of antimicrobial resistance and the need to strengthen surveillance at all levels, from local to global and across multiple sectors including health, agriculture and the environment, Wellcome has brought together a new international expert group termed SEDRIC (Surveillance and Epidemiology of Drug Resistant Infections Consortium). SEDRIC aims to advance and transform the ways that the global community are able to track, share and analyse information on antibiotic use, together with rates of drug-resistant infection and burden of disease and, importantly, contamination of the environment. Its goal is to strengthen the availability of information needed to monitor and track risks, and to support the translation of surveillance data into interventions, changes in policy and more effective practices. Crucially, SEDRIC will have a particular focus on defining gaps in data and knowledge and barriers to the delivery of global surveillance functions, and on finding solutions to support existing systems such the WHO GLASS reporting mechanism. Further details describing SEDRIC are summarised in Table 1.

The SEDRIC Board, which oversees the Consortium, includes 11 experts with extensive experience in drug-resistant infection and infectious pathogens and diseases more generally, including human and veterinary health, infection control and antibiotic stewardship, laboratory microbiology, epidemiology, genomics, modelling, implementation and delivery of surveillance, and policy making. This group will be complemented by a wider network of members who are willing to contribute to the activities undertaken by SEDRIC, including the development and writing of reviews and opinion pieces, working groups, and commissioned work.
At the first SEDRIC Board meeting in January 2018, gaps and barriers to effective surveillance were identified and prioritised. The single most important short-term problem identified by these discussions was related to the generation, collection, collation and dissemination of high quality epidemiological data, together with the need for creativity in the use of existing data and proxy measures, and linking to existing in-country networking infrastructure. The collection of data across multiple sectors in a way that is useful and complementary to other data is a formidable challenge. Other issues include consideration of the optimal amount and frequency of data collection; standardised definitions and harmonised data collection methodology to permit comparability of data; the strengths and weaknesses of existing data collection tools, including their capacity for generalisability across a range of settings and levels of infrastructure; and mechanisms to record patient outcome from bacterial infection. A SEDRIC working group has been formed to further evaluate gaps and challenges relating to data and report on its findings and recommendations.

Allied to this data theme is consideration of how to identify, access and use available data from multiple sources. For example, large volumes of high quality bacterial susceptibility data to numerous antibiotics are generated by pharmaceutical companies to fulfil regulatory requirements. Extensive information is also generated through research. In low and middle-income countries (LMIC), available quality-assured data originates mainly from individual research projects in well-funded academic institutions or the private sector. Where other sources of surveillance information are currently limited, this could be of considerable benefit. Whilst it is widely acknowledged that developing a reliance on data generated by research or from the private sector has its drawbacks in terms of generalisability and sustainability, these data could provide significant information in the interim to countries that are actively working towards capacity building and training in critical areas such as microbiology. A SEDRIC-led paper to be published in the coming months will discuss this in more detail.

SEDRIC will also promote the translation of technological innovations into public health solutions in alignment with Wellcome’s goal to support and facilitate the rapid advancement of discoveries into improving health globally. Surveillance of drug resistant infections is ripe for new innovation. This includes consideration of new laboratory instruments that are robust, simple to use and provide accurate bacterial identification and susceptibility testing; the development of data capture tools and connectivity including innovative data interfaces that are co-designed with end-users; and the applicability of Artificial Intelligence. These also need to be capable of capturing trends in antimicrobial use and overall patterns of infectious diseases. SEDRIC is particularly interested in ‘leapfrog’ technologies, although any innovation must be suitable and accessible for LMIC settings. SEDRIC will specifically consider the role of pathogen genome sequencing as an integral component of surveillance and epidemiology. Such data can contribute to an accurate picture of the global emergence and spread of pathogens, identify the genetic basis for phenotypic resistance, and track novel resistance mechanisms as they emerge. Numerous research groups and some national surveillance programmes are actively engaged in sequencing bacterial collections from around the world, but efforts are largely fragmented and data are generally not combined and compared. Last but not least, SEDRIC will support and advocate for the translation of data into interventions and policy

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| **Contact details and webpage** | sedric@wellcome.ac.uk  
https://wellcome.ac.uk/what-we-do/our-work/surveillance-and-epidemiology-drug-resistant-infections-consortium |
changes. It is crucial that data from GLASS and multiple sources are critically analysed and translated into actions at both country and global levels at a pace that brings benefit to health.

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Data availability
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References

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SEDRIC board members are listed on the Wellcome website: https://wellcome.ac.uk/surveillance-and-epidemiology-drug-resistant-infections-consortium-board