Matthew Stein: When a Superbug Strikes Close to Home, How Can You Deal With it?

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In May of 2007, the world was captivated by the story of an MDR (multidrug-resistant) and XDR (extensively drug-resistant) tuberculosis are major concerns for health officials around the world. Estimates for the number of people in the world infected with these strains of TB vary from one-half million to 1.5 million people. The XDR version is much rarer than MDR. However, it is also much more difficult to treat, with a treatment success rate of only about 30 percent in areas with good TB-control programs, and is often fatal without special treatment, so it has officials worried about the potential for pandemic should the XDR form start to show up more often. Since the MDR form of TB has shown a tendency to rapidly develop resistance to new antibiotics, and even though it is now responsible for roughly 10% of all hospital induced infections, there is little known about what causes this disease. In spite of receiving treatment with the most advanced medications, MDR tuberculosis can still be deadly.

The current swine flu may run its course, like SARS did, never reaching pandemic proportions, but that does not mean that one of a number of existing antibiotic resistant superbugs won't come knocking at your family's door some day. There are a host of antibiotic resistant superbugs that are already well established in our world, each with the potential for bringing great tragedy to an individual, or to explode into a global pandemic. In this article, I am going to provide several examples of the former, but also balance that fear with knowledge and hope gained from stories of individuals who have used a variety of alternative medicines, procedures and herbs to heal when the high-tech pharmaceutical arsenal of mainstream western medicine had failed to work its magic.

Last fall, Miss Brazil (Mariana Bridi da Costa), who took 7th place in the 2008 Miss World Pageant, was on the top of her world. Raised in abject poverty, she was well on her way to super-model stardom, and it seemed as if her future was bright and limitless. In late December, she was hospitalized and treated for a urinary infection. On January 3, 2009, she was transferred to Dorio Silva Hospital in "septic shock," a serious medical condition caused by infection induced inflammation. The culprit was the bacteria Pseudomonas aeruginosa. This variety of bacteria has shown a tendency to rapidly develop resistance to new antibiotics, and even though it is now responsible for roughly 10% of all hospital induced infections, there is little known about what causes this disease. In spite of receiving treatment with the most advanced medications, Mariana Bridi's disease spread throughout her body. The spreading infection resulted in necrosis, which is the deadening of tissues caused by septicemia with its resulting lack of blood flow to organs and tissues. In an attempt to save her life, they amputated her hands and feet, and placed her on a respirator, but she died anyway.

In May of 2007, the world was captivated by the story of an American man honeymooning in Europe, when tests performed before he left for Europe indicated he had contracted the Extreme Drug Resistant (XDR) form of Tuberculosis (TB). In spite of a lingering severe cough, he had flown to Europe for his wedding and honeymoon. He made headlines when he disappeared from health officials' radar and hopped a public plane from Europe to Canada. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) were so concerned about the threat that he posed to the general public that they tracked him down in upstate New York, issued a federal isolation order (the first such order issued in four decades), and forced him to wait in isolation at a hospital in Manhattan for a few days until they could pick him up in a private CDC jet. They transported him to Grady Hospital in Atlanta and then on to Denver in a medevac plane for further tests and treatment (New York Times, July 5, 2007).

MDR (multidrug-resistant) and XDR (extensively drug-resistant) tuberculosis are major concerns for health officials around the world. Estimates for the number of people in the world infected with these strains of TB vary from one-half million to 1.5 million people. The XDR version is much rarer than MDR. However, it is also much more difficult to treat, with a treatment success rate of only about 30 percent in areas with good TB-control programs, and is often fatal without special treatment, so it has officials worried about the potential for pandemic should the XDR form start to show up more often. Since roughly one-third of the world's population is infected with TB, and some 1.5 million people annually die of it (mostly from regular TB, and not the MDR or XDR strains), the specter for a near-term drug resistant TB pandemic is quite real.

"XDR-TB is very serious—we are potentially getting close to a bacteria that we have no tools, no weapons against.”

--Paul Sommerfeld, Stop TB, from BBC News, September 6, 2006

Most of us tend to think that widespread plagues are a thing of the past, that diseases can never again slaughter huge numbers of people and ravage the planet as they have for countless centuries. Quite the opposite is true, especially to the potential viruses to mutate into deadly new strains, the increasing number of antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria, the widespread opportunities for bio-weapons to fall into terrorist hands, and the almost instantaneous intercontinental transport of humans and animals via air travel, the risk of worldwide plagues is probably worse now than ever before.

Imagine a Hurricane Katrina-sized catastrophe occurring in 50 major U.S. cities at the same time, and you have some idea of the worst-case scenario for a crippling global pandemic. Medical centers, essential services, and government personnel would be overwhelmed. If there were no viable vaccines, or if one was only available in limited quantities, most health care workers would desert medical facilities to care for the sick in their own homes or to simply get out of the cities to improve their own chances for survival. When things get real bad, most buses, trains, trucks and planes stop running, causing food and fuel deliveries to slow to a trickle. If this sounds far-fetched, realize that this was exactly the scenario when the Spanish flu hit the United States in 1918-1919, killing more people in a few short months than had died in all of WWI.

In general, viruses do not respond to antibiotics, and the few antiviral pharmaceuticals that have been developed may have little or no effect on new strains of viruses. Most people do not realize it, but typical antiviral drugs, such as Tamiflu, should be taken within 24 hours of the onset of flu symptoms in order to be effective, and show little or no effect if taken after 48 hours after symptom onset. It can take decades to develop vaccines for specific viruses. For example, after spending billions of dollars on research, scientists have yet to produce viable vaccines for the AIDS, Ebola, and hemorrhagic dengue fever viruses. Additionally, viruses have the capacity for "gene swapping" — the ability to share genetic material between different strains, sometimes resulting in mutations that combine the deadly properties of one strain with the contagious properties of another. Experts are gravely concerned that this could still happen with the 2009 H1N1 strain of avian flu, and it appears that this is what has already happened in the case of the less deadly, but still quite serious, Mexican swine flu strain of virus. DNA analysis performed on specimens from Mexican flu victims, taken from tissue samples that were preserved in wax, indicate that the Spanish flu was originally an avian flu virus that mutated into a swine flu virus before mutating into a human flu virus. According to the CDC, the new strain of swine flu that showed up recently in Mexico contains gene sequences from North American and Eurasian Swine flu, North American bird flu, and North American human flu.

Additionally, a significant and growing threat is cultivated right here in the United States, as a result of our modern factory farm methods for growing livestock. Some bright researchers figured out that farm animals fed sub-clinical doses of antibiotics grow faster than animals that eat regular feed, get sick less often, and fewer animals are lost to disease. This has been a boon to the pharmaceutical industry (40 percent of U.S.-made antibiotics are fed to animals), but it is also contributing to the end of "The Age of Wonder Drugs." Since bacteria reproduce at 500,000 times the rate of humans, natural genetic selection has made antibiotic-fed farm animals (and our own bodies after we ingest the antibiotics contained within the flesh of these farm animals) into perfect breeding grounds...
for growing super-microbes that are resistant to modern medicines. When Jim Hensen, the beloved inventor of The Muppets, succumbed to a pneumonia-like infection from an antibiotic resistant form of strep (Group A beta-hemolytic streptococci), the best doctors and antibiotics that money could buy were unable to save his life.

The good news is that there are many alternative medicines, herbs, and treatments that can be quite effective in the fight against a wide variety of viruses and antibiotic-resistant bacteria, to which mainstream high-tech Western medicine has little or nothing to offer. The bad news is that 99 percent of the doctors in our hospitals are not trained in these alternatives, and don't have a clue about what to do when their pharmaceutical high-tech medicines fail to heal. If you wait until a pandemic starts, you will have only a slim chance for locating an available health practitioner familiar with alternative herbs, medicines, and methods.

In the words of Robert Saum, PhD, the typical attitude amongst most of his medical colleagues in this country is, "If I didn't learn it in medical school, it can't be true."

"During Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, which killed up to 50 million people worldwide, homeopathic physicians in the U.S. reported very low mortality rates among their patients, while flu patients treated by conventional physicians faced mortality rates of around 30 percent. W. A. Dewey, M.D., gathered data from homeopathic physicians treating flu patients around the country in 1918 and published his findings in the Journal of the American Institute of Homeopathy in 1920. Homeopathic physicians in Philadelphia, for example, reported a mortality rate of just over one percent for the more than 26,000 flu patients they treated during the pandemic.

Today, a number of homeopathic remedies for the flu are available, including oscillo, or oscillococcinum, which has been shown to shorten the duration of symptoms when taken within 48 hours of onset. Homeopathics have been given this remedy since 1925. Interestingly, it's made from the heart and liver of ducks, which carry flu viruses in their digestive tracts." --Excerpted from "Could Homeopathy Prevent a Pandemic?" by Tijn Toubou and Kim Ridley, Ode Magazine, January 2006, issue 30.

When it comes to antibiotic-resistant bacteria and deadly viruses, so-called "alternative medicine," including herbs and a variety of other treatments, may well be your most effective form of treatment and prevention. A few years ago, my wife Josie suffered from an antibiotic-resistant urinary infection that was probably caused by the same strain of antibiotic-resistant E. coli that reportedly plagued women across the country (San Francisco Chronicle, Oct. 14, 2001). We spent nearly $2,000 on doctors and multiple courses of three different antibiotics, including three full courses of the infamous Cipro, but the infection returned every time we tried to discontinue the Cipro, which was the only antibiotic that had any positive effect.

After nearly two months of unsuccessful medical treatment, Josie was finally able to kick the infection in less than one week, once she resorted to self-treatment with a combination of grapefruit seed extract (from the health food store) and large quantities of homemade antibiotic colloidal silver solution (roughly one quart a day).

When our beloved Malamute, Maya, came down with a serious antibiotic resistant kidney infection, the strongest antibiotics would keep her infection at bay, but none of them would heal it. After several months of nearly continuous antibiotic treatment, the toxicity of the antibiotics was taxing our beloved pet's kidneys and liver, and blood tests indicated that her time on earth was drawing to a close as her kidney's were failing. We lamented about this situation to our homeopathic MD, Dr. David Edwards, our homeopathic MD, and he said, "Since you have cultured her urine, tell me what the bacteria is, and I will provide you with a customized homeopathic remedy for your dog." We told Dr Edwards that the culture indicated our pet was stricken with Enterococcus D, and he commented that this was a particularly nasty bug, which could be quite difficult to heal. Within three days after receiving the homeopathic drops, specifically formulated to help heal Enterococcus D, our pet was back to her old self. After being diagnosed as having perhaps two more weeks to live, Maya surprised us all, along with her two veterinary doctors, when she lived for several more years with a high quality of life.

When Robert Saum, PhD, checked himself into a medical clinic due to an ugly swollen painful mound on his leg that looked like the bite from a poisonous spider, it was diagnosed as being caused by a Methicillin Resistant Staph infection, commonly known as MRSA (also known as the "flesh eating bacteria"). The attending physician discussed the diagnosis with Dr Saum, and the potential need to surgically remove the infected tissue. Saum instead requested that the attending physician lance the infection, allowing the wound to drain. Saum then proceeded to pour colloidal silver based ASAP antiseptic gel, from American Biotech Labs, into the open wound, and drank a couple tablespoons of their broad-band SilverBiotics solution, several times a day. Saum relates that the pain totally disappeared within two hours, and this potentially deadly infection was mostly healed within the next 48 hours.

"The heightened alarm comes in response to a federal report indicating that the bacteria, Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA, are responsible for more deaths in the United States each year than AIDS."--Ian Urbina, New York Times, October 19, 2007

Bob Beck, DSc, an inventor and physicist, invented the modern Xenon electronic flash bulb when he was just a teenager. He was quite proud of the fact that he sold his patent for this device for $500, and used these proceeds to pay for his last year of university (the recipient of this patent made something on the order of $25 million over the following decades). When Beck was in his mid fifties, his health was failing. Doctors told him that a sedentary lifestyle, poor diet, and old age had simply caught up with him, and there was very little he could do about it. Beck scoured various medical journals and books, and discovered groundbreaking medical research outlining procedures that had proven quite effective in clinical studies, yet had never gone through the long and expensive process of FDA approval (typically requiring on the order of $5-25 million) and commercialization. Beck focused his creative genius on developing a series of simple electronic devices and procedures to enable people to apply these medical innovations quite simply and cost effectively in the comfort of their own home. This resulted in what is now known as "The Beck Protocol," which Beck refused to patent. Instead, he gifted it to the world, telling anyone who wished to listen how to make his devices and to practice his protocol.

The Beck Protocol consists of four self-administered treatments:

1. Blood electrification:
   Groundbreaking research at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine (disclosed in patent #5,188,738) showed that pulsed microcurrents of electricity would affect bloodborne viruses and bacteria (such as AIDS and Hepatitis C) in ways that prevents these organisms from being able to multiply and grow. The original patent was for a complicated, surgically implanted device. While suffering from his own serious health issues, Beck used the information presented by the attending physicians faced mortality rates of around 30 percent. W. A. Dewey, M.D., gathered data from homeopathic physicians treating flu patients around the country in 1918 and published his findings in the Journal of the American Institute of Homeopathy in 1920. Homeopathic physicians in Philadelphia, for example, reported a mortality rate of just over one percent for the more than 26,000 flu patients they treated during the pandemic.

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2. Colloidal silver:
   Silver has been used medically for more than 100 years. Severe burn victims are typically treated with silver based ointments, which help fight infection when oral antibiotics are ineffective. The groundbreaking research of orthopedic surgeon and medical researcher, Dr. Robert Becker (totally different guy, easily confused with Bob Beck due to similar names), as related in his phenomenal book, "The Body Electric: Electromagnetism and the Foundation of Life," showed that in animals, to kill bacteria, molds, and viruses, silver particles also adversely affect the body's electrical healing mechanisms. In fact, Dr. Becker saved several patients from amputation using charged silver particles to heal infections that had become gangrenous and bones that were not mending in spite of medical treatment with massive doses of antibiotics and other allopathic medicines. It was the physicist, Bob Beck, who built on Dr. Becker's research and invented the simple modern colloidal silver generator that makes ionic colloidal silver using three 9-volt batteries, distilled water, and pure silver wire. A "nebulizer" can be handy for turning a colloidal silver solution into a fine mist that one may inhale to help battle lung infections.
3. Magnetic pulsing:
After working with his blood electrification invention, Bob Beck realized that there were organs of the body that did not receive a high flow of blood, and that these organs could benefit if they were directly stimulated with microelectric currents. He invented an electromagnetic pulse-generating device that stimulates microelectric currents directly inside organs and glands located within the body via the mechanism of electromagnetic induction. Conventional permanent magnets cannot generate these currents, since it takes a strong rapidly fluctuating magnetic field to generate this effect.

4. Ozonated water:
Beck found that many people, himself included, experienced fatigue and other flu-like symptoms after they started drinking colloidal silver and doing the blood electrofiltration. It was proposed that this was caused by toxins released when the body's foreign organisms were killed. Beck found that drinking highly oxygenated water, made by bubbling ozone through drinking water, helped the body eliminate these toxins and avoid the flu-like symptoms.

Many naturopathic doctors, and other alternative health practitioners, are helping people to combat viruses, antibiotic resistant bacteria, and serious chronic illnesses, such as AIDS, various cancers, fibromyalgia, and chronic fatigue syndrome using the Beck Protocol, often combined with various herbal cleanses and treatments.

Based upon personal experience, here is a short list for some of the herbs and alternative remedies that I can recommend to have on hand:

**Astragalus.**
One of the most highly regarded herbs used in Chinese medicine, astragalus is an efficient immune-system booster. Do not take astragalus if you are already suffering from a fever. Many herbal immune system booster combinations, available at health food stores, are based around astragalus.

**Colloidal/ionic silver.**
The medicines that hospitals use to fight skin infections on severe burn patients are typically based on the active component of silver. Colloidal/ionic silver is a broad-band antibiotic solution that has been used against a myriad of harmful protozoa, bacteria, and viruses. It is available in health food stores or can be made for just pennies a day with a simple commercial or homemade colloidal/ionic silver generator. It appears that all colloidal silver solutions work to varying degrees. In my experience, the homemade stuff is not very stable and should be kept out of direct sunlight and used within a few days after it was made.

**Usnea.**
This is a powerful herb with antibiotic, antiviral, and antibacterial properties. Usnea is used internally or externally against bacterial, fungal, or viral infections.

**Tea tree oil.**
Tea tree oil.

**Oil of oregano.**
Oil of oregano is another broad-band super-herb with powerful anti-oxidant, antiviral, and antibacterial properties. Traditionally used for treatment of wounds, headaches, sinusitis, lung infections, colds, intestinal worms, athlete's foot, and so on. I like to supplement my diet with two oregano capsules a day.

**Elderberry.**
A traditional Native American medicinal herb, echinacea has become a part of mainstream self-help medicine. It is now available at most drugstores, since its antiviral and antibacterial properties have been scientifically documented.

**Garlic.**
A true "wonder herb," garlic has powerful antibiotic and antibacterial properties as well as tremendous nutritional antioxidant value. Whereas the number of active ingredients in penicillin is one, at least 35 active ingredients have been identified in garlic, making it much more difficult for bacteria to grow resistant to garlic than to penicillin. Use raw, fresh cloves, since cooked or powdered garlic usually loses most of its potency.

**Goldenseal.**
Goldenseal is one of the most popular herbs of all time. It has powerful antifungal and antibacterial properties against organisms such as Candida and E. coli. The powdered root has strong cauterizing properties and can be used directly on wounds to reduce or eliminate excessive bleeding.

**Grapefruit seed extract (GSE).**
Like garlic, GSE is another true "wonder herb," exhibiting powerful antibiotic, antiviral, and antibacterial properties. It has been used successfully to battle numerous diseases and ailments, including Lyme disease, Candida, Giardia, amoebic dysentery, many kinds of parasites, athlete's foot, ringworm, gum disease, herpes, colds, flu, and some forms of arthritis.

**Homeopathic medicine.**
Homeopathy appears to stimulate the body's own immune system in ways that Western science still doesn't fully understand. For a reasonable price, you can buy homeopathy kits that contain 10 to 30 common remedies for treating a wide variety of ailments. Trained homeopaths typically have a huge number of homeopathic remedies on hand, and can select the appropriate remedy, or combination of remedies, for their clients.

**Hyssop.**
Though little used in the West, hyssop is another powerful herb, exhibiting strong antiviral and antibacterial properties. One of the few herbs that has been proven effective against active tuberculosis, hyssop is often prescribed by Chinese herbalists for lung ailments. In today's world, where there is a constant threat that antibiotic-resistant tuberculosis might blossom into a global pandemic, I like to keep at least a pound of hyssop on hand.

**Oregano oil.**
Oil of oregano is another broad-band super-herb with powerful anti-oxidant, antiviral, antifungal, anti-parasite and antibacterial properties. Traditionally used for treatment of wounds, headaches, sinusitis, lung infections, colds, intestinal worms, athlete's foot, and so on. I like to supplement my diet with two oregano capsules a day.

**Tea tree oil.**
This powerful antifungal and disinfectant is used topically (do not take internally) for skin infections, itchy scalp, and fungal infections such as athlete's foot. This oil is very penetrating and will penetrate through the skin to heal sealed-over infections, boils, and pimples. Tea tree oil is one of the few liquids that can seep through toenails. I sometimes combine tea tree oil with other oils and herbs to lend its more penetrating properties to the rest of the concoction.

**Usnea.**
Another powerful herb with antibiotic, antiviral, and antibacterial properties, usnea is used internally or externally against bacterial, fungal, or viral infections. Usnea is often combined with spilanthes or echinacea.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but just a sampling of a few of the alternative techniques, medicines and herbs that I have found most effective in over thirty years of personal experience with herbs, alternative medications and treatments.

I am not suggesting you turn your back on regular medical diagnosis and treatments. A wise course of action is to become familiar with several of the alternative therapies and herbs that have proven themselves by helping thousands of people to heal, many times only after high tech western pharmaceutical based medicine had failed to heal. Since my primary concern is with getting and staying healthy, and not with performing scientific studies on myself or my
loved ones, I tend to go for the "shotgun" approach (combining multiple alternatives). I suggest you have a variety of these materials on hand, in the event that western pharmaceutical medicines are either unavailable, or ineffective.

There is much wisdom in the Yankee adage, "Hope for the best, but plan for the worst!" and in the old Chinese proverb, "Is it not too late if one waits until one is thirsty before digging a well?"


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