INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT RESEARCH

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Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) has increased worldwide in bacterial pathogens, leading to treatment failures both in human and animal infectious diseases, the consequences of which can be severe. This phenomenon is regularly attributed to excessive or incorrect use of antimicrobials, both in humans and in animals, where resistant bacteria can circulate either directly, or through the food chain or the environment.

The European Commission made an important step in the fight against AMR with its decision to ban the use of antimicrobials in feed as from 2006. The successive Community Framework Programmes for Research (FP), in particular FP5 and FP6, supported this decision through a number of research projects. These projects addressed the issue through two ways, via alternative products (e.g. plants extracts, phages) and through changes to the production systems so that the need for using antimicrobials is decreased (e.g. investigating gut function, genetic resistance to disease). In addition, research efforts on diagnostic tools and control of animal health were ensured. These efforts were maintained under the Seventh Framework Programme. All together from FP5 to FP7 (1999-2012) some €600 million were spent for projects on antimicrobial resistance, although mostly in human health. Some projects cover both the human and veterinary sectors.

The five-year Action Plan against the rising threats of AMR launched by the European Commission in November 2011, contains two actions related to research: Action 6, that aims to promote public-private collaborative research and development to bring new antibiotics to patients and Action 11, that calls for reinforcing and co-ordinating research efforts. AMR was given a high priority in the last work programmes of FP7, with a package of call topics in three work programmes for a total of over €100 million. Cooperation between Member States takes place also in a European frame, e.g. through ERA-NETs and joint programming. A recent Joint Programming Initiative on AMR is due to develop a strategic research agenda and expected to implement joint activities in 2013. This initiative is not exclusively focussed on the human side. In further support to the five-year Action Plan, the European Commission intends to focus on AMR in its next framework programme on research (i.e. Horizon 2020) currently in the legislative process.