



Antibiotic resistance: five minutes with . . . Paul McNeive

The Irish fiction writer explains his unlikely collaboration with England's chief medical officer

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The BMJ

“I suffered bad burns in a car accident in 1982 which culminated in losing both my legs. I was learning to walk on two new prosthetic legs and I picked up cuts, bruises, and blisters which would sometimes get infected.

“About 10 years ago I went to the doctor with a routine looking skin infection. I was prescribed antibiotics, but nothing happened. I went back again and was prescribed a longer course, again nothing happened. I tried another, and then another; nothing happened. I had a multi resistant bacteria infection and the antibiotics didn't work anymore.

“Eventually I had to have a skin graft to get rid of it. I had gone back to work, but the infection caused me to retire because the consultants warned me that they were running out of options. I had had sepsis a couple of the times I had been hospitalised, and there was a risk of losing my one remaining knee, which is crucial to my mobility.

“This all caused me to look into antibiotic resistance, which I knew nothing about. I began to research it, and I became more and more intrigued and appalled at what was going on. To me, it's on the same level as global warming; it's that level of catastrophe.

“I had written one nonfiction book and I wanted to write more. I retired and began writing a newspaper column, which I still

do now. I also wrote *The Manhattan Project*. The book explores the idea of whether terrorists could induce and accelerate the consumption of antibiotics—for example, by getting more of them into the food chain, by disrupting cleaning in hospitals, or by spreading bacteria around hospital wards.

“The book has been a bestseller in Ireland and was picked up by a UK publisher. Six months ago, the publisher sent a copy to (England's chief medical officer) Sally Davies, because she's one of the best known and most outspoken voices on antimicrobial resistance (AMR). She invited me to meet her and said that I was the patient face that could help bring the problem to life—beyond the sterile ‘doctors warn about AMR threat’ newspaper story that Joe Public switches away from very quickly. She asked me to help her with some initiatives that she is involved in and I'm grateful for her interest.

“I don't think the problem is getting the political attention that it should be. Hopefully, people who read the book will get an entertaining read and also be a lot wiser about the problem.”

The Manhattan Project is published by Black and White Publishing.

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