



Healthcare Professional Information Sheet

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Sponsorship: University of Hertfordshire

Research Ethics Committee: East Midlands Leicester South

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Title of Project: Exploring Antibiotic Prescribing Perceptions, Attitudes, and Knowledge among Doctors, Nurses, and Pharmacists at Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Introduction:

UK health authorities have raised concerns about antimicrobial resistance (AMR), a "hidden pandemic" potentially emerging post-COVID-19 if antibiotics aren't prescribed responsibly. This study aims to investigate the perspectives of doctors, nurses, and pharmacists on antibiotic prescription practices, both before and amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The research revolves around the concept of 'antimicrobial stewardship,' a term defined by the [NICE guidelines](#) as a healthcare system-wide initiative promoting and tracking the prudent use of antimicrobials to ensure their future efficacy. Our objective is to explore the factors influencing the decisions made concerning antibiotic prescriptions before and during the COVID-19 crisis. We invite you to participate in this study at the Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust to identify the factors affecting the implementation of AMS and the prescribing behaviour, perceptions, and attitudes towards antibiotics during this pandemic. Your participation will provide valuable insights into antibiotic prescribing behaviour, aiding us in identifying strategies to enhance antibiotic prescribing practices and ensure their appropriate and judicious use.

This PhD research study was conducted per the University of Hertfordshire's regulation, UPR RE01. You can review UH's regulations by following this link:

<https://www.herts.ac.uk/about-us/governance/university-policies-and-regulations-uprs/uprs>. Once you have accessed this link, please scroll down to Letter S, where you'll find the 'Studies Involving the Use of Human Participants' regulation. We kindly request that you carefully review the following information before deciding to participate. If anything is unclear or if you require further information, please do not hesitate to ask us.

We appreciate your time spent reading this. Thank you.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

Antimicrobial stewardship (AMS) was established to optimise antibiotic use, prevent antimicrobial resistance, enhance patient safety, and reduce healthcare expenses. However, the implementation of AMS faced significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Public Health England (PHE) has consistently emphasised the importance of AMS implementation in acute care settings to ensure appropriate, effective, and safe antibiotic utilisation. The specific AMS measures that improved antibiotic prescribing during the pandemic and the actual outcomes remain unknown. This study, conducted as part of a doctoral program, aims to investigate factors influencing AMS implementation and antibiotic prescribing behaviours, perceptions, and attitudes before and during the COVID-19 pandemic at Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (Luton & Dunstable and Bedford hospitals). Notably, a substantial number of deaths from antimicrobial resistance result from infections such as Respiratory Tract Infections (RTIs) and pneumonia.

The research project comprises three sequential studies:

1. **The initial study** conducted a systematic literature review to examine the implementation of antimicrobial stewardship (AMS) in acute care settings. The review yielded promising findings regarding the selection of appropriate AMS implementation strategies for these settings.
2. **The second study**, conducted in September 2022, is a retrospective investigation examining 640 patient medical records. Data were extracted from the records of patients who were prescribed antibiotics for Respiratory Tract Infections (RTIs) or pneumonia, including cases related to COVID-19, before and during the pandemic.
3. **The third study**, initiated on June 14th, is a prospective investigation that explores healthcare professionals' knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes regarding antibiotic prescribing before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who has reviewed this study?

The research project has obtained ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of East Midlands - Leicester South, with reference number 22/EM/0161. Additionally, it has been reviewed and approved by the University of Hertfordshire Ethics Committee and R&D ethics at Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary, and there is no obligation to take part. Your involvement is important to achieve the study's objectives. All your responses will be anonymous and treated with confidentiality. The data collected will be used only for research purposes.

**Are there any restrictions that may prevent me from participating?**

Suppose you are a healthcare professional (doctor, nurse, or pharmacist) who has worked at Luton & Dunstable Hospital and/or Bedford Hospital before or during the COVID-19 pandemic, and you are currently employed at one or both of these hospitals. In that case, you are eligible to participate in this survey questionnaire.

How long will my part in the study take?

The survey is estimated to take approximately 20 minutes to complete, and no additional time commitments are expected from participants.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will receive an invitation to complete the online survey, which can be accessed through the link provided in the email. Submitting your responses after completing the survey will be understood as your implied consent to participate in the study. Only the research team will have access to the collected data, which will be completely anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

What are the possible disadvantages, risks, or side effects of taking part?

Participating in the study is not expected to have any disadvantages other than the time commitment. If you have any questions or concerns, you can directly contact the study team using the provided contact information for further information and assistance.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

While you may not experience immediate personal benefits from your participation, it will significantly contribute to enhancing our understanding of factors influencing antibiotic prescribing during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is anticipated that the overall results of this study will inform the development of AMS policies and actions that could support effective and appropriate antibiotic use in future emergencies, to decrease the threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

How will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

The collected data are anonymised and non-identifiable from the start. It will not be possible to link any comment to any participant. This data is securely stored on the University of Hertfordshire's (UH) storage system, which requires a double security check to access.

Can I withdraw from the study after completing the survey?

Participants have the right to withdraw from the study or not participate without giving a reason before the survey has been submitted. But once participants have completed and submitted the questionnaire, they cannot withdraw. At this stage, all responses are completely anonymised, and they will be included in the analysis and dissemination.

**Will the data be required for use in further studies?**

The data collected will not be used in future studies beyond the current research.

What happens when the study ends?

The survey responses will be analysed for publication. It is anticipated that the overall results of this study will inform the development of AMS policies and activities to improve antibiotic use and prescribing in hospitals. The survey results will be shared with AMS teams and disseminated within peer-reviewed scientific journals and conferences.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by:

- The University of Hertfordshire Health, Science, Engineering and Technology Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority.
- NHS Research Ethics Committee.
- R&D Department at Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Whom can I contact if I have any questions?

Should you require additional clarification or more information, please feel free to reach out to

Rasha Abdelsalam Elshenawy, the principal investigator, email: **Email:** r.a.elshenawy@herts.ac.uk

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Dr Zoe Aslanpour, principal supervisor, email: z.aslanpour@herts.ac.uk

Dr Nkiruka Umaru, supervisor, email: n.e.umaru@herts.ac.uk

If you would like to make a formal complaint, please email: research-sponsorship@herts.ac.uk, or call 01707 284000. You could also email complaints@bedfordhospital.nhs.uk or call 01234 792680.

We greatly appreciate your time in going through this information and considering participating in this study. Thank you.