

Reframing resistance

How to communicate about antimicrobial resistance effectively

How an issue is ‘framed’ – explained and presented through specific themes and angles – can influence how it is received by an audience. It can mean that people are more likely to understand, engage with and support action on an issue or, on the contrary, oppose it.

Global action to address drug-resistant infections is not happening at the scale and urgency needed. Action among political leaders can be strengthened with public support. But public understanding of antimicrobial resistance and its impact is currently limited. We can change this by communicating more powerfully.

Through this research, we sought to identify the most effective way to frame this issue to increase public comprehension and persuade the public and policy makers of the case for action. We conducted a multi-phase project, based on quantitative and qualitative research with members of the public in seven countries, to test the efficacy and impact of different communication frames.

The five principles

Our research showed that there are universal themes that can be used effectively across countries.

We identified five principles for communicators when talking to the public about antimicrobial resistance:

1. Frame antimicrobial resistance as undermining modern medicine.

Framing the issue as undermining modern medicine helps the public understand the breadth of the impact antimicrobial resistance has currently and could have in the future. This should be coupled with examples of routine procedures and common illnesses and injuries that could be affected by antimicrobial resistance.

2. Explain the fundamentals succinctly.

Simple, straightforward and non-technical explanations of antimicrobial resistance are necessary and effective in increasing understanding of the issue. It is important we explain that microbes develop resistance, not individuals, and also that our explanations include the part that human activity is playing in accelerating the issue.

3. Emphasise that this is a universal issue; it affects everyone, including you.

Explain that this is a universal issue, but one in which anyone could be affected. We need to increase the sense of personal relevance, and responsibly highlight the risk that antimicrobial resistance poses to all.

4. Focus on the here and now.

Make it clear that antimicrobial resistance is currently having a significant impact – and that this impact will become increasingly severe if action is not taken. This is more effective than pointing to what could happen in five or ten years.

5. Encourage immediate action.

We can boost the impact of communications on antimicrobial resistance by framing the issue as solvable. Crucially, this needs to be accompanied by a clear and specific call to action.

Whenever possible, these principles should be used in combination, to maximise impact.

We encourage experts and practitioners working on antimicrobial resistance to use these principles to inform public communications. Together, by using this language collectively and cohesively, our communications can have more impact – we can help increase public understanding of and encourage more action on antimicrobial resistance.

Read the full report and access the practical toolkit at www.wellcome.ac.uk/reframing-resistance

**Wellcome exists to improve health
by helping great ideas to thrive.**

**We support researchers, we take on
big health challenges, we campaign
for better science, and we help
everyone get involved with science
and health research.**

**We are a politically and financially
independent foundation.**

**Wellcome Trust, 215 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE, United Kingdom
T +44 (0)20 7611 8888, E contact@wellcome.ac.uk, wellcome.ac.uk**

The Wellcome Trust is a charity registered in England and Wales, no. 210183.
Its sole trustee is The Wellcome Trust Limited, a company registered in England and Wales, no. 2711000
(whose registered office is at 215 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE, UK). SP-7008.3/10-2019/MS