Audit

Antibiotic Prophylaxis in ENT Surgery

James Barraclough¹
MRCS DOHNS

Peter Radford²
MA DOHNS MRCS

Ira Das³

Christopher Jennings⁴
FRCS

¹Specialty Registrar in ENT, Department of ENT, Head and Neck Surgery, Russell’s Hall Hospital, Dudley, UK
Contact details: jamespbarraclough@hotmail.com
²CT2 in Surgery, Charing Cross Hospital, London
³Consultant Microbiologist, Department of Microbiology, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham
⁴Consultant ENT, Head and Neck Surgeon Department of ENT, Head and Neck Surgery, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham, UK

Abstract
Peri-operative antibiotics have a significant role to play in the prevention of hospital acquired infections. Poor prescribing practice can lead to the emergence of resistant organisms and antibiotic associated infections. An audit was undertaken in which the first audit cycle identified current antibiotic prescribing practice for 139 patients. 5 patients had received antibiotics when not indicated. Following this, evidence based guidelines were issued to improve and standardise prescribing throughout the department. The second audit cycle included 128 patients and identified only 1 patient receiving inappropriate antibiotics and 1 patient not receiving antibiotics when they were indicated. No adverse events were identified.

Keywords
Audit, antibiotics, prophylaxis, hospital acquired infection.

Introduction
The complications associated with peri-operative infection account for significant morbidity and mortality in surgical patients leading to an increase in the length of hospital admission.¹ Surgical site infections (SSIs) compose up to 20% of all healthcare-associated infections and at least 5% of patients undergoing surgery develop an SSI. There are also significant cost implications.²,³ Healthcare costs for a patient with an SSI are, on average, approximately twice the cost for a patient without an SSI.⁴

Peri-operative prophylactic antibiotics are commonly used to help reduce the frequency of post-operative infections. However, the over-use of broad spectrum antibiotics is becoming well recognised and there is now a drive towards a more rational approach to antibiotic prescribing to help to reduce the production of resistant organisms.⁵ The inappropriate prescribing of antibiotics has also been recognised as a major cause of antibiotic associated infections such as C. difficile colitis. On average this increases a patient’s hospital stay by 3 weeks and costs £4000 – 10000 per case.⁶ Over the last ten years the Department of Health and the Health Protection Agency have developed specific measures to tackle the incidence of MRSA and C. difficile. This has lead to a 50% reduction of the reported cases of MRSA bacteraemia and C. difficile infection over the last 10 years and this is due to a number of factors including improved standards of prescribing.⁷

The evidence behind the efficacy of antibiotic prophylaxis in surgery has been lacking up until recently and a great variation in prescribing practice has been observed. The Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) produced guidelines regarding surgical antibiotic prophylaxis in 2008 containing advice regarding specific surgical scenarios suggesting whether antibiotics are indicated and which to consider based on the best available evidence.⁸

With this in mind, we sought to establish what the prescribing practice for our ENT department was for all subspecialties. This formed the basis of the first cycle of an audit. The results of this were then used to highlight areas where prophylaxis was not in keeping with recognised guidelines. A specific departmental guideline for antibiotic prophylaxis was agreed and distributed throughout the unit. The second cycle of the audit was then undertaken to
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Antibiotics are frequently prescribed as the consequences of wound infections are notorious difficult to treat. As the evidence for their use and more importantly, their non-use is becoming more apparent, prophylactic prescribing must become more justified. This is particularly important in the current era of hospital-acquired infections. Hospital cleanliness is improving but knowledge of hospital acquired infections is varied. Aroori et al. have found a significant lack of knowledge concerning C. difficile infection amongst healthcare professions, in particular amongst consultants and nurses. Antibiotic restriction is the single most effective measure to reduce C. difficile infections.

The SIGN guidelines which were reviewed as part of this audit go some way in helping surgeons to know which situations antibiotic prophylaxis is indicated. There is a growing body of evidence that a full course of oral antibiotics post-operatively is commonly not indicated. The first cycle of this audit identified that a number of individuals were practicing this and after an explanation of the current evidence, this prescribing practice has now significantly reduced. An understanding that clean and clean-contaminated surgery in ENT rarely requires antibiotic prophylaxis has now been acknowledged in this unit. This is particularly true for common middle ear and nasal procedures.

A further reason for poor prescribing practice is not only lack of current knowledge but resistance to change itself. Cabana et al. have demonstrated that there is a poor long term adherence to new protocols that are implemented. We plan to re-audit again to assess the longer term adherence to the guidelines. Analysis of the departmental morbidity and mortality data for three months following introduction of the guideline did not reveal any increase in post operative wound infections, hospital acquired infections or antibiotic associated infections.

Reducing hospital acquired infections including SSIs would lead to reduced costs for treating these patients. In addition, rationalised prescribing should reduce the use of more expensive broad spectrum antibiotics. The cost advantages for more strict measures to limit the spread of MRSA have been established and we believe that the process of improving prophylactic antibiotic prescribing will go some way in benefiting the hospital financially as well as the patients undergoing surgery.

Conclusion
A clear, evidence based antibiotic guideline has been created to help to rationalise antibiotic prescribing. A reduction in antibiotic prescribing suggested by this guideline did not cause any increase in post-operative wound infections. By prescribing fewer antibiotics, the risk of antibiotic associated problems such as C. difficile and resistant bacteria (e.g. MRSA) can be reduced. This may also help to achieve cost savings.
Guidelines for Antibiotic Prophylaxis in ENT Surgery

**Otology**
- Grommet insertion – consider single dose of topical antibiotic drops upon insertion
- Cochlear implantation - single dose of co-amoxiclav (1.2g IV) on anaesthetic induction, then 2 further doses within 24 hours
- Other middle ear surgery - single dose of co-amoxiclav (1.2g IV) only justified if considered as a contaminated/dirty procedure.
- BIPP packing as appropriate.

**Skull Base Surgery**
- Repair of CSF leak - single dose of co-amoxiclav (1.2g IV) on anaesthetic induction

**Rhinology**
- Prophylaxis only justified if prosthesis is used in reconstructive surgery

**Head and neck surgery**
- Benign surgery - clean; no antibiotics
- Benign surgery – contaminated (eg. by saliva); single dose of co-amoxiclav (1.2g IV)
- Neck dissection (malignant) - single dose of co-amoxiclav (1.2g IV)
- Open vuscus surgery - single dose of co-amoxiclav (1.2g IV) on anaesthetic induction

**Notes**
- These guidelines are based on the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network national clinical guideline published July 2008 and are based on the best current evidence available.
- Intravenous antibiotics should be given ≤ 30 minutes before the skin is incised
- If the procedure lasts >4hrs and prophylaxis is indicated, a second dose should be considered intra-operatively
- Patients colonised with MRSA should have a course of intranasal mupirocin prior to high risk surgery
- Patients undergoing high risk surgery who are MRSA positive or penicillin allergic should receive teicoplanin 600mg IV if patient <70kg or 800mg if >70kg plus gentamicin 120mg IV

**Key Learning Points**
- Poor antibiotic prescribing practice leads to the emergence of resistant organisms and antibiotic associated infections
- Evidence is now emerging regarding the use of antibiotics for prophylaxis in ENT and evidence based guidelines now exist
- A completed audit cycle has identified highlighted poor prescribing practice and improved outcomes are now being seen

**References**