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## Press Release

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### **Washington Hospital hosts Author, Infectious Disease Specialist to Speak About Antibiotic-Resistant “Superbugs”**

**Fremont, Calif.** – People all over the world are getting sick and dying of an incurable plague. Hospitals are inundated. And there is no cure in sight.

It sounds like the plot to a far-fetched futuristic sci-fi movie, right?

The bad news is it’s not, according to Brad Spellberg, M.D., associate professor of medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, who works in the Division of General Internal Medicine at the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute and Harbor-UCLA Medical Center.

Spellberg, the author of *Rising Plague: The Global Threat from Deadly Bacteria and Our Dwindling Arsenal to Fight Them*, will visit Washington Hospital to present a free Health & Wellness seminar focusing on what he calls a little recognized crisis that is “going to get worse.” The lecture will be held on Wednesday, August 18, from 1 to 2:30 p.m. at the Conrad E. Anderson, M.D. Auditorium, located at 2500 Mowry Avenue (Washington West) in Fremont. Community members can register for this free seminar by visiting [www.whhs.com](http://www.whhs.com) or by calling Health Connection at (800) 963-7070.

#### ***An unaware public***

“The public doesn’t know anything about this problem,” he says. “People have only just started to become aware of antibiotic-resistant bacteria because of MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *staphylococcus aureus*). They have no idea that new antibiotics are not being developed.

“The truth is we are already seeing infections that cannot be treated.”

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As a task force member for the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA), Spellberg says the organization has been lobbying Congress to take action. Progress, though, has been slow moving.

“Politicians react to what their constituents are aware of,” he explains. “We’re facing the exact same problem as those working to raise awareness about global warming: elected officials are not going to spend money to fix a problem when constituents don’t know about it.”

As a result, Spellberg says his objective is to make sure members of the public are aware of the serious implications that come with a lack of new antibiotic development amidst rising numbers of bacterial infections known as “superbugs” that cannot be successfully treated with commonly prescribed antibiotics.

“The goal in entitling my book was to get people’s attention,” he says. “I was thinking, ‘How can I explain the concept that this is a problem that already exists?’ We’re already there, we’re already seeing it—but the frequency is going to continue to increase.

“We already have the crisis and it is going to get worse. The question is: how do you catch somebody’s attention about an infectious disease? We’ve got people dying of infections that we can’t treat for the first time since 1935.”

The 1940s marked the beginning of widespread availability of the bacteria-fighting miracle drugs that today most of us take for granted. Giving health care professionals an effective way to fight infections caused by bacteria, antibiotics effectively revolutionized medical care and dramatically reduced illness and death from infectious diseases, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

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**A false sense of security**

But, as a result of antibiotics’ glowing successes for more than half a century, most people don’t worry about infections, Spellberg says.

“People who have an infection think, ‘I’m going to get antibiotics and be fine,’” he says. “But we have already seen patients die of infections that are resistant to every FDA-approved antibiotic. We have nothing in the pipeline that can treat pan-resistant infections in the next five to ten years.”

Even more alarmingly, Spellberg says pharmaceutical companies have been leaving the development of new antibiotics at a rapid rate. The result?

“We’re going to have a geometric growth of these infections,” he says. “It’s predictable. You can look forward and know it’s going to happen.”

Spellberg, who has attended numerous workshops, meetings and conferences on the subject of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, says he was particularly struck by a comment made by Dr. John Bartlett, a professor of medicine in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and past president of the IDSA.

“He said as we look ahead five to ten years from now, people are going to say, ‘You knew these things were coming, why didn’t you do anything?’” Spellberg remembers Bartlett saying.

After working on the problem for many years, Spellberg has come to the conclusion that the only way to make gains is to raise public awareness of the problem and instill a sense of urgency about antibiotic-resistant infections and the lack of antibiotic development to treat them.

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**Learn how to protect yourself**

During his presentation, Spellberg will talk about who gets these infections and what community members can do to protect themselves. He also will address the causes of these infections, as well as what people in the community can do to help turn the tide before the problem gets worse.

He stresses that antibiotic resistant infections are something everyone should be aware of, because it’s not a matter of if, but when the crisis is going to hit close to home.

“When I get sick, I would like to have antibiotics to treat my child and my parents,” he says. “We need to have public pressure applied to elected officials because there are specific actions we need them to take in order to make progress.

“I want audience members to understand that there is a crisis in infections and lack of antibiotic development, but there are things they can do.”

Washington Township Health Care District is governed by an elected board and includes Washington Hospital Healthcare System. Unlike a municipal or county hospital, Washington Hospital’s operating expenses, research, community programs, and employee salaries are funded by revenues generated through providing patient and other health care services. Washington Hospital Healthcare System includes a 359-bed acute-care hospital; the Taylor McAdam Bell Neuroscience Institute; The Gamma Knife® Center; Washington Radiation Oncology Center; Washington Outpatient Surgery Center; Washington Outpatient Rehabilitation Center; Washington Outpatient Catheterization Laboratory; Washington Center for Joint Replacement; the Institute for Minimally Invasive and Robotic Surgery; and Washington West, a complex which houses Washington Women’s Center, Outpatient Imaging Center and additional outpatient hospital services and administrative facilities.

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***(For more information, please contact Christopher Brown, director of Community Relations, Washington Hospital Healthcare System, (510) 791-3417.)***