Preventing Deaths in Africa by Improving Antibiotic Access and Effectiveness

Washington DC (October 26, 2008) The Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (APUA) today announced a $1.37 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to explore ways of reducing millions of preventable deaths from severe respiratory and diarrheal infections in Africa. This project was announced in conjunction with a colloquium at the annual ICAAC/IDSA meeting warning of increasing antibiotic resistance.

The project will investigate ways to fast-track antibiotics to sick children in the village before they succumb to severe diarrhea or acute respiratory illnesses. APUA will work with local field staff in Zambia and Uganda to map antibiotic supply and distribution channels, detect counterfeit drugs and measure laboratory capacity to monitor antibiotic resistance. It will also document the prevalence and costs of drug resistance.

In the developing world, antibiotics are often out of reach for patients and dispensed by health workers and street vendors without adequate training or laboratory guidance. “Because of rapidly increasing antibiotic resistance, no currently available antibiotic can be assumed to be active against a particular pathogen. Continual monitoring is needed to determine the right drug choice.” said Stuart B. Levy, MD, President of APUA and Professor of Medicine and Microbiology at Tufts University School of Medicine. The project builds on 27 years of APUA’s global research and advocacy work to improve antibiotic access and effectiveness worldwide.

Pneumonia and severe diarrhea are leading causes of death in Sub Saharan Africa. Each year, more than three million children in developing countries die from acute respiratory infections, and approximately 1.9 million children die from diarrheal diseases. Penicillin resistance for Strep pneumoniae is as high as 50 percent in some parts of Africa. Douglas Holtzman, PhD, MPH of the Gates Foundation notes: “This project will provide essential field data needed to improve antibiotic access and use in developing countries. The ultimate goal is to reduce the public health threat of drug resistance while saving more lives.”

Established in 1981, by Stuart B. Levy, MD, a global infectious disease expert, the Boston-based APUA has affiliates in more than 60 countries, including 11 in Sub-Saharan Africa. APUA’s mission is to promote appropriate antimicrobial access and preserve the power of antibiotics. (see www.APUA.org)