Letters to the Editor

Let's Say Good-Bye to Obesity: More the Chicken (Antibiotic-Treated) in Kitchen, More the Obesity Risk

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Dear Editor,

Malaysia is proudly a home of multi-ethnic people. Malaysians over the years have adapted different cuisines to explore the diversity in flavours. It's interesting to note that Malays dominate the chicken lover's category. The increase of chicken meat consumption is due to the versatility of the meat, relatively low cost in comparison to other meat and the acceptance of the chicken meat to all religions. It is the most popular dish served during the festival occasions of Malays, Chinese or Indians communities. Unfortunately, the wide range of cuisines, not limited to Chinese, Indian has left us with unhealthy eating habits. It is pity that most chicken lovers do not know about antibiotic treated chicken and the involved potential risks. The question-should Malaysians go meatless?-seems to be hypothetical. Some recent studies suggest that the consumption of antibiotic treated chicken contribute to the spread of drug-resistant pathogens in humans and leads to early childhood obesity (1, 2). This is worrying if we want to leave a healthy generation. This deadly association incited me to present this warning note to the chicken lovers.

According to latest statistics from National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS 2015) more than 7% of the Malaysia children (age < 5 years) are overweight. The data from (Nutrition Society of Malaysia 2015 (NSM) revealed that almost 30% of children, aged between 6 and 17, were either overweight or obese (3). Although childhood obesity is multifactorial, the impact of diet cannot be overlooked. Though the livestock holders defend that antibiotics are administered for prophylaxis purpose, 80% of the total antibiotics are used for growth promotion in food animals (4). The difference between antibiotic administration to humans and veterinary purpose is that in the latter case, it is given simultaneously to many animals leading to antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

It's estimated that the use of antibiotics in food animals will increase 67% by the year 2030 as the demand for protein grows worldwide (2). Meanwhile, the worldwide cases of obesity have already crossed 600 million and in Malaysia, the prevalence of childhood obesity, consistent with international trends, is rapidly increasing (3). My hypothesis is that chronic low-dose exposure to antibiotics contributes to weight gain and we get that exposure in our food and water. Though there is no study from Malaysia supporting this deadly link, in the light of above evidence, I believe that antibiotic use in animal foods might be a contributor to the rising levels of obesity. The adverse outcomes of childhood obesity have widely been reported and the recent studies suggest a marked association of obstructive sleep apnea (5). Therefore, it is time to promote healthy and active lifestyle including appropriate diet and regular exercise among the children by their parents and teachers and employing mass media. On the positive side, Malaysian Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism announced that Malaysia hopes to produce antibiotics-free chicken by 2020 (6). With a positive attitude, let's ponder over the newly emerging threat of AMR in animal foods as an emergency crisis and aim towards a healthy generation.

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Conflict of Interest

None

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