

## REPORT

## THE VAIDYA'S OATH 29 JUNE 2016

*Making a Public Health impact through Theatre*

"Rarely does a health crisis come into your living room like this" quips one of the characters in the opening scene of the play **the Vaidya's Oath**, referring to one of the biggest health threats of the twenty first century- Antimicrobial/Antibiotic Resistance (AMR). India, being home to various antibiotic-resistant bacteria, has still not woken up fully to this threat and the play, staged at the India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi, on 29 June, highlighted the problem of AMR and the lack of seriousness to tackle this urgent public health threat.

**The Vaidya's Oath** written by Gautam Raja and directed by Jeff Teare, was developed by Jagriti Theatre, Bangalore, in collaboration with Theatrescience UK and the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Bangalore. The play was made possible by a Wellcome Trust UK International Engagement Award in 2015. The show in New Delhi was supported by the Wellcome Trust/DBT India Alliance and the IIC.

**The Vaidya's Oath** weaves together a story of a disenchanted primary health centre (PHC) doctor, Ajay who has been given a punishment transfer to a remote town in UP because he raised the issue of AMR at the health minister's office; his wife, Uma who is from Bangalore and struggles to adjust in the new place and with Ajay's embitterment; Kamala, a mother, whose baby is admitted in the PHC with untreatable sepsis infection; and Rahul, who doubles up as a seismologist and a budding stand-up comedian, enjoys cracking microbiology jokes. Their lives intersect and the play

slowly brings out the many problems each of the characters is facing - deftly touching upon various hard facts of human life, the medical practice in the country, science and medical myths, socio-economic hues in India, and of course the big villain of this century, AMR. The play keeps reminding the audience about the imminent threat of AMR through lines such as, "money cannot buy you protection from infection", "earlier, scientists used to say 'don't panic' and now they are saying 'you are not panicking enough' ". Ajay's passionate monologue towards the end of the play to an audience of doctors, post the introduction of Chennai Declaration (a roadmap to tackle AMR), alluded to the relevance of the play's title - **the Vaidya's Oath**- a Vedic oath taken by the physicians around 15 BC as a commitment towards the profession. If the oath is broken "the knowledge shall bear no fruit" – the failure to tackle antibiotic-resistant infections will be a failure of medical knowledge and practice with catastrophic consequences in India and worldwide.

The play throughout maintained an effortless balance of staying true to the art of theatre and to the scientific and medical facts of the subject at hand. **The Vaidya's Oath** is an important demonstration of how the theatre arts can be used effectively to convey science and promote awareness of public health issues in India and has hopefully set the stage for many such theatre-science collaborations in the future.

Find out more about "The Vaidya's Oath" [here](#).