

FACES OF AMR PROFILE STORIES



Candace DeMatteis

“Through my work, I have always appreciated the need for more innovation around antibiotics. With my personal experience, I appreciate it even more.”

Candace DeMatteis has known since she was a young child that she has allergies to certain antibiotics. As a result, she avoided two big classes of antibiotics: penicillins and sulfa drugs. Over the years, the allergies never posed a problem since there was always an alternate option when she needed an antibiotic. Recently, however, the options haven't been as simple and have come with some unexpected side effects.

For Candace, it all started with a skinned knee.

During a daily walk with her dog, Candace fell in her driveway. Her knee got banged up, but it was nothing serious and healed naturally. A few weeks later, she developed tenderness and a blister over the scar. Given the proximity to her knee, she had to see an orthopedist to determine if an infection formed over the bone. Fortunately, it was just a skin-level infection below the scar, but to treat it, the doctor recommended an antibiotic that's an option for people with Candace's allergies. Unfortunately, that particular antibiotic makes Candace extremely sensitive to the sun. She discovered this side effect during a previous time when she needed the antibiotic. Candace was in her car, rolled down the window to speak with a neighbor and developed a rash during the 20 minutes she was exposed to the sun.

Since it was summer, avoiding the sun would be a challenge, so Candace asked about other treatment options. She was shocked to learn that the next antibiotic option given her allergies would require consulting an infectious disease doctor, involved significant side effects and was reserved for serious infections. It was literally like going from a fly swatter to a bazooka with nothing in between.

Once her infection healed, Candace sought out allergy testing to see if she was still allergic to penicillin and related antibiotics. Her physician shared that about 10% of people report being allergic to penicillin, but in fact 90% of them are not. The testing took a couple hours and, importantly, Candace learned that she can take penicillins without worrying about an allergic response.

Serving as the policy director for the Partnership to Fight Infectious Disease, Candace knows a lot about the risks associated with antimicrobial resistance and the importance of continued innovation for antibiotics. Her personal experience now makes her work even more relevant. “Millions of people deal with medicine allergies,” she said. “Having options among antibiotics that treat a range of infections is critically important.”

