

Pharma giant Roche does deal to develop superbug killer

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Pharmaceuticals giant Roche said on Monday that it had joined forces with fellow Swiss company Polyphor to develop an antibiotic to fight a superbug that has taken hold in hospitals.

Hospital-acquired infections are a major global concern, causing 25,000 deaths a year in the European Union alone.

They are blamed on factors such as sloppy hygiene practices, the inappropriate use of drugs which has enabled [resistant bacteria](#) to thrive, and contact between humans and animals, either directly or via the food chain.

In a statement, Roche said that it had signed an exclusive worldwide licensing agreement with Polyphor to develop and commercialise the latter's experimental antibiotic POL7080.

The drug's target is the *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* bacteria, which can give rise to life-threatening infections and usually occurs in patients in hospital, as well as members of the broader public who have weakened immune systems.

Pseudomonas aeruginosa accounts for one in every 10 hospital-acquired infections in the United States and is listed as one of the six most dangerous drug-resistant microbes.

It causes infections of the urinary tract, respiratory system infections,

joints and bones, and digestive system.

Roche underlined that it was a particular danger for patients with cancer, AIDS, severe burns, and chronic infections such as cystic fibrosis, and had a 50-percent fatality rate in some of those groups.

Generally treated with traditional antibiotics, it has become more difficult to treat because of rising antibiotic resistance, Roche said.

Under the terms of the deal, Roche is to make an initial payment of 35 million Swiss francs (28.4 million euros, \$38.4 million) to Polyphor, which is not listed in the stock exchange.

Provided certain development, regulatory and commercial milestones are reached, Roche's total payments could reach 465 million Swiss francs, it said.

In addition, Polyphor is entitled to receive double-digit royalties on product sales.

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