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Steve Weisel at Mt. Katahdin, Maine — the northern terminus of the Appalachian trail.

MRSA ON THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL: THE STORY OF STEVE WEISEL

Hiking the Appalachian Trail, Steve Weisel thought little of the blisters on his feet until he discovered they were infected with life-threatening methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)—an increasingly common “superbug” that does not respond to first-line antibiotics. Mr. Weisel’s story demonstrates the urgent need for new and innovative therapies to treat this growing threat.

Mr. Weisel required aggressive medical intervention during his 18-day hospital stay.

Sixty-two years old and very active, Steve Weisel was about 300 miles into a long trek across the Appalachian Trail when blisters on his feet became too painful to bear. He stopped the hike early and returned to his home in Virginia.

Over the next week, Mr. Weisel’s blisters did not heal and he developed a fever. When his temperature spiked, he checked into the infectious diseases clinic at the National Naval Medical Center in Maryland. The blisters he thought were harmless turned out to be infected with the dangerous superbug MRSA, which had also spread to his lungs. As a result, he had developed

pneumonia and a collection of pus-filled abscesses between his lungs and chest wall.

To thwart the MRSA infection that had permeated his lungs, Mr. Weisel required aggressive medical intervention during his 18-day hospital stay. He underwent a number of major surgical procedures to drain the abscesses, and he was treated with six different antibiotics. He left with home-administered intravenous vancomycin—a medication that produced a rash so large and unpleasant that he had to be switched to yet another drug.

Though patients typically contract MRSA in a health care setting, rates of community-acquired MRSA have

grown rapidly over the past 10 years and are not showing signs of declining.¹

Mr. Weisel's battle lasted for well over a month and required a lengthy hospitalization and treatment followed by an arduous rehabilitation.

Fortunately, he made a full recovery and completed his 2,000-mile hike. His story illustrates the growing need for new antibiotics that can fight infections quickly and effectively.

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The Pew Health Group's Antibiotics and Innovation Project addresses the growing public health challenge of multidrug-resistant infections by supporting policies that stimulate and encourage the development of antibiotics to treat life-threatening illnesses.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "MRSA Statistics," last updated April 8, 2011, www.cdc.gov/mrsa/statistics/index.html (accessed November 9, 2011).