

HRH Princess Benedikte of Denmark, Patron of the World Diabetes Foundation, at the official opening of the first foot care clinic in India.



A royal step to prevent the diabetic foot in india

With diabetes reaching almost epidemic proportions in India, improved diabetic care and treatment is making great strides up the country's healthcare agenda. Millions of untreated or inadequately treated patients have generated a severe problem in terms of secondary health complications, with the diabetic foot representing the most serious disabling complication. Responding to the growing problems of diabetic foot complications, the board of the World Diabetes Foundation had long awaited the official opening of a preventive foot care clinic in Chennai, India. That day finally arrived in connection with the board's official visit to India on 15-19 March this year.

"I believe this diabetic foot care clinic will make an enormous difference to the lives of its patients." These words were said by HRH Princess Benedikte of Denmark, Patron of the World Diabetes Foundation, at the official opening of the first foot care clinic in India. Shortly afterwards, the Princess and Lars Rebien Sørensen, CEO of the pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk and member of the WDF board, presented custom-made sandals to some of the neediest patients with foot problems. The new foot care clinic at the Ambedkar Institute of Diabetology in Chennai is the first of its kind in India. The institute treats 1,000 people

a day, and the foot care clinic will be screening around 100 people with diabetes for foot problems on a daily basis. Being a government-run clinic, treatment is intended for the poorest of the poor and offers patients the chance to be tested, measured and given preventive foot care for the first time.

On average, about 6% of the people with diabetes attending the new clinic have foot ulcers, and nearly 50% of the patients are at high risk of developing them. By raising awareness of preventive foot care, the clinic aims to reduce diabetes-related amputations in India by 50%, saving 3,600 legs a year.

India's fight against diabetes

32 million Indians have diabetes. With one in every eight people over the age of 20 years in urban India suffering from diabetes, the country has the world's largest diabetes population. Yet many people still consider diabetes to be a western disease, not acknowledging the profound threat diabetes represents in the developing countries.

Further exacerbating the situation in India is the early onset of the condition. Indians are likely to develop type 2 diabetes approximately ten years earlier than Caucasians. Coupled with an increasing life span, excessive consumption of calories, sugar and fats, sedentary lifestyle and inadequate treatment, India is facing a heavy burden of patients with secondary health complications.

The increasing foot problem

Half of all people with diabetes experience various types of nerve diseases causing loss of sensitivity in the feet. In consequence, patients may be walking around unaware of infected ulcers, which - if left untreated - will result in amputation. This is the situation for thousands of people in the developing countries, caused by the fact that many people walk around barefoot or wearing unsuitable shoes.

“In that part of the world, losing a limb will often result in people losing their ability to work and becoming dependent on their family. It is therefore an important area of diabetes care where we can really make a difference,” says Lars Rebien Sørensen.

“One significant problem with foot care in India is that people do not really understand how easy it is for the diabetic foot to suffer irreversible injury.

This situation reveals an urgent need for information to increase public awareness of the complications. The lack of tools for preventing foot injuries and offering quality foot care is adding to the problem,” he adds.

Funding the foot care clinic

Money raised in connection with the annual World Diabetes Day in November 2003, a traditional fundraising day within Novo Nordisk, has funded the opening of the clinic in Chennai. A total of DKK 300,000 was raised, with the money being donated to WDF and earmarked for a new preventive foot care clinic in India. There is much to suggest, however, that the donation will enable more than one foot care clinic to be opened, thus taking preventive diabetes foot care in India further forward.

Diabetes on the agenda

Diabetes Foot Care is only one among several diabetes-related projects in India initiated by WDF. A National Diabetes Programme has been launched to ensure that the Indian population gains access to effective and affordable diabetes care. A Diabetes Eye Care project aims to reduce blindness resulting from diabetes. And, finally, an Urban Prevention and Control project aims to prevent diabetes and related complications through lifestyle modification and early detection campaigns.



WORLD **DIABETES** FOUNDATION

Lottenborgvej 24 , DK-2800 Kgs. Lyngby , Denmark
Phone +45 44 42 74 38, Fax +45 44 44 47 52