

Fighting diabetes in mongolia through joint efforts

Asia is experiencing a heavy increase in the number of people with diabetes – Mongolia being no exception. Change of lifestyle – from nomads to townspeople – as a result of strong urbanisation is a key factor for almost 10% of the Mongolian population now facing diabetes. And with an almost non-existing disease management the catastrophe is lurking. In this interview, managing director of the World Diabetes Foundation (WDF), Leif Fenger Jensen describes how an ambitious idea of funding a new diabetes clinic in Mongolia was brought to life and executed by means of a strong partnership between local enthusiasts and government parties, Novo Nordisk's Japanese affiliate, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and WDF.

“The idea of funding a diabetes clinic in Mongolia first aroused in the autumn of 2003. Inspired by Novo Nordisk's TakeAction! programme in Tanzania – a diabetes fundraising project among Novo Nordisk's employees – the Japanese affiliate of Novo Nordisk (NNPL) felt encouraged to attempt to raise money for a similar project in Asia,” Leif Fenger Jensen explains. Mongolia was chosen for the country's urgent need for urban diabetes prevention and control and in acknowledgement of the country's need for support in doing so.

“The idea, however, met its first obstacle in the fact that Japanese companies are not allowed to seek donations outside the company walls. A company engaging in a non-profitable project and getting involved in charity is therefore very rare in Japan and normally left for charitable organisations,” Leif Fenger Jensen describes.

But this did not stop the idea from evolving into a living project. On the

contrary. The countermove to the restricted fundraising rules of Japan was to engage WDF as intermediary and with WDF involved NNPL was now allowed to seek donations outside the company.

Bringing in the expertise

Another reason for involving WDF was to benefit from the extensive experience the organisation has gained from working with diabetes management in the developing world. As the project's catalyst WDF has transformed the sympathetic idea of NNPL into a tangible project by use of a strong network of experts.

"We have had a very clear division of labour. NNPL has focused on fundraising activities and making the project feasible in the first place. WDF has focused on the implementation bringing in WHO as a partner in the project and working closely together with the local diabetes organisation in Mongolia and the National Ministry of Health," explains Leif Fenger Jensen.

"WHO has recently appointed Mongolia and Vietnam as its main areas of concern for preventing and treating diabetes in Asia and asking them to engage in the project in Mongolia was therefore very obvious," he continues. The involvement of WHO has both added a diabetes education component to the project and established a link to other United Nations activities in the non-communicable disease area in Mongolia.

"Non-communicable diseases are very new to healthcare professionals in most developing countries. WHO's educational programme in Mongolia is therefore first and foremost a training in diagnosing diabetes. The training will take part in collaboration with Mongolia's Ministry of Health and is planned to rollout in the beginning of December 2004. 200 doctors throughout the country will be going through the educational programme that will enable them to action against the national threat of diabetes," Leif Fenger Jensen further explains.

Raising and transforming funds

5 million Japanese yen or about 47,000 US dollars has already been raised and with fundraising activities planned all through 2005, NNPL hopes to be able to raise 80-90,000 US dollars in total for the project. The future fundraising activities will be done in collaboration with the Japanese diabetes association. The money will uncut be donated to the new

diabetes clinic and to the country-wide doctor education programme. Part of WDF's focus area has been to negotiate a contract with the hospital in Erdernet, the city where the new diabetes clinic will be located.

“Although the size of Western Europe Mongolia only has 3-4 large cities, Erdernet being one of them. Erdernet is situated in the northern part of Mongolia and is a mining town. With one diabetes clinic already established in Ulaan Baatar, the capital of Mongolia, Edernet was chosen for the new clinic in a wish to cover an area as large as possible thereby offering diabetes care to a considerable part of Mongolia's population,” explains Leif Fenger Jensen.

WDF will establish the clinic and provide the necessary diagnostic equipment just as it will educate the doctors that will be working at the clinic. Once established the Mongolian Ministry of Health and the Government of Edernet will together manage the daily operation of the clinic. The clinic is set to open in the beginning of 2005 and is scheduled to treat around 150 people each month.

“The project has proven to be a text book example in partnering centred on the simple idea of wanting to help people in need for help,” Leif Fenger Jensen concludes.



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