

THE EMERGING BURDEN OF CHRONIC DISEASES AND ITS IMPACT ON DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Danida



WORLD DIABETES FOUNDATION

PRESS RELEASE

Chronic diseases are now a leading cause of premature death of poor people in developing countries

Copenhagen, Denmark, 14th April 2010 – World-renowned health experts will gather at the International conference on the emerging burden of chronic diseases and its impact on developing countries that takes place in Copenhagen on 15th -16th April. At the conference they will present new knowledge and discuss ways forward to address one of the world's leading health challenges.

Chronic diseases are currently the cause of 35 million deaths each year – or 60% of all deaths worldwide – of which 80% occur in low and middle-income countries. According to the World Bank, chronic diseases are now among the most significant causes of illness and death among the working-age populations in developing countries. One third of the poorest two quintiles in developing countries die prematurely from chronic diseases affecting their families and acting as a poverty trap. This has a substantial impact on countries' possibilities for economic growth.

“In many developing countries there is a growing need to increase focus on public health initiatives that can address prevention of chronic non-communicable diseases,” explains Søren Pind, Denmark's Minister for Development Cooperation. “At the same time developing countries are much more vulnerable to the consequences of this emerging burden. They still struggle with the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases, which will remain a major challenge for a number of years. Their health systems are overburdened and lack health staff. Denmark is pleased to welcome multilateral and bilateral donors, public health experts and key stakeholders across the globe to the Conference and to take the lead in discussing these important issues.

“To alleviate the dual burden of disease, policy makers must take an integrated approach by targeting both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Necessity is the mother of invention and when resources are scarce we must think of ways to optimise the available ones. It is time for all partners to start seeing communicable and non-communicable diseases as two related areas and to explore joint strategies for detection, prevention and management, building on the same infrastructure and health care capacity,” explains Dr. Anil Kapur, Managing Director of the World Diabetes Foundation.

“We believe addressing the prevention and control of chronic non-communicable diseases offers a window of opportunity to create healthy development. Unless this opportunity is seized by the donors, governments and other partners, the current progress on the internationally agreed development goals will be undermined and countries will face unbearable costs to their economies and health systems. The world is thus at a unique tipping point in the history of public health, an opportunity that will rapidly fade if no timely action is taken.”, explains Prof. Pierre Lefèbvre, Chairman of the World Diabetes Foundation.

The conference is hosted by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the World Diabetes Foundation. It is formally supported by the World Bank Group, the International Diabetes Federation, the World Heart Federation, the International Union against Cancer, NORAD, the Norwegian Directorate of Health and the Danish National Board of Health. More than 130 public health and development assistance experts will convene at the event, including ministers of health from Uganda and Mozambique, the Danish Minister for Development Cooperation, the Danish Minister for the Interior and Health, bilateral donors, representatives from the World Health Organization and World Bank, industry partners, non-government organisations and media.

NOTES TO THE EDITOR:

Dealing with the double disease burden

The explosive rise in chronic non-communicable diseases is attributed to an ageing population, obesity and the spread of undesirable lifestyle behaviours, including unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, exposure to tobacco and harmful use of alcohol, as a consequence of globalisation and urbanisation.

The impact of chronic non-communicable diseases on the productive labour force is estimated by the World Bank to generate substantial losses in national incomes amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars, marginalising families and children into a downward spiral of poverty. However, evidence shows that more than 80% of premature heart diseases, strokes and type 2 diabetes and over 40% of cancers can be prevented by adopting healthy lifestyles, encouraged by the implementation of wise public policy.^[1]

Recent systematic reviews documents that communicable and non-communicable diseases mutually affect each other in a negative direction. Diabetes more than triples the risk of developing tuberculosis. On top of this, malnutrition and infections during pregnancy cause low birth weight which paradoxically, is associated with a high risk of developing metabolic syndrome, including diabetes in the offspring.^[2] The situation is further aggravated by the fact that the risks to which women and their offspring are exposed during pregnancy increase manifold when pregnancy is associated with diabetes - and by the fact that a child born to a woman with diabetes has eight times greater risk of developing diabetes itself.

In addition, women have limited access to health care facilities because of illiteracy, ignorance and negative social customs. A major barrier is continuing gender inequality. For instance, in many developing countries woman lack access to health facilities because of inadequate resources and lack of time due to heavy daily work burdens.^[3]

In its Global Risks Report, the World Economic Forum ranked non-communicable diseases among top five global risks. Exploring joint strategies for detection, prevention and management of non-communicable diseases and building on the same health infrastructure can substantially reduce the burden on health care budgets^[4]. The World Bank estimates that one third of the poorest two quintiles in developing countries die prematurely from chronic non-communicable diseases affecting their families and acting as a chronic poverty trap.^[5]

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[1] World Bank Publication; Public Policy and the Challenge of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases, 2008.

[2] International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics, volume 104, Diabetes, Women and Development. Meeting summary, expert recommendations for policy action, conclusion, and follow up action, 2008.

[3] International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics, volume 104, Diabetes, Women and Development. Meeting summary, expert recommendations for policy action, conclusion, and follow up action, 2008.

[4] World Economic Forum, Global Risk Report, 2009.

[5] World Bank Publication; Public Policy and the Challenge of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases, 2008.