PRESS RELEASE

International Conference Explores How to Improve Diabetes Prevention and Care for Refugees

Dead Sea, Jordan
10 April 2017

In a conference organised by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), and the World Diabetes Foundation (WDF), experts in healthcare services delivery for refugees from different sectors are gathered at the Dead Sea in Jordan this week. They will address an urgent issue - how to improve the quality of healthcare services delivered to refugee populations with diabetes - and will discuss the best prevention and treatment practices used internationally.

‘The International Conference on Refugees and Diabetes’, held under the patronage of HRH Princess Muna Al-Hussein from 10 to 12 April, brings together more than 75 representatives of United Nations organisations; Ministries of Health from Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine; bilateral agencies; civil society organisations; academia; and the private sector. While the focus will be on refugees in the Middle East and North Africa, other regions with refugee challenges, such as West Africa, will also be represented.

Diabetes and Refugees

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are 422 million people worldwide who currently have diabetes, and almost 80 per cent of them live in developing countries. If current trends continue, diabetes will be the seventh leading cause of death by 2030. However, efforts to provide diabetes prevention and care in low-resource settings face many challenges, including lack of awareness about the disease and its prevention, lack of access to proper care, and environments not supportive to healthy living. There is also mounting evidence that poor maternal health increases the risk of diabetes for both the mother and her children, creating a vicious cycle of susceptibility to this chronic disease for future generations. These challenges increase significantly in refugee situations, as they may also be challenged with restricted access to food, healthy activities, medicines, and the treatment of diabetes and its complications.

“There are now nearly 21.3 million refugees worldwide. There is an urgent need for joint efforts by all stakeholders to address the growing threat that diabetes poses to this vulnerable population,” says Dr. Akihiro Seita, the Director of the UNRWA Health Programme. “Diabetes places a great burden on individual refugees, their families, and the health-care staff and systems that serve them. Trends in the Palestine refugee population illustrate the size of the problem. In 1992, UNRWA treated 14,500 people with diabetes – today, it treats more than 150,000, and the number is increasing by 4 to 5 per cent each year. But there are steps we can take. We look forward to working with colleagues throughout the region and around the world to improve the health and prospects of refugees with diabetes.”

The International Conference on Refugees and Diabetes will offer an opportunity for participants to share their experiences and best practices concerning diabetes prevention and management among refugees. It
will also help in establishing a joint coordination mechanism between different key organizations providing non-communicable disease (NCD) care – in particular diabetes care – to refugees.

In addition, experts participating in this conference will identify tools for the provision of NCD care during emergencies and refugee situations, including the medicines and medical devices required to manage the most common NCDs in primary care. At the end of the conference, working groups with key relevant organizations from refugee host countries will be established to ensure the implementation of agreed-upon action plans and to enhance the sustainability of quality diabetes care for refugees.

“For many years, the World Diabetes Foundation has been involved in serving refugees who are living with diabetes. Having diabetes as a refugee has a significant, deleterious effect on the quality of life,” says Dr. Anders Dejgaard, Managing Director of the World Diabetes Foundation. “We look very much forward to sharing our experiences and listening to others in order to establish an action plan. A multisectoral approach is needed to address this growing threat to millions of refugees worldwide.”

During the conference, an Action Plan with practical solutions for improving coordinated diabetes care for refugees will be created, and a Call to Action will be endorsed by the participants. Afterwards, a summary of the meeting’s findings and commitments will be compiled and published through different stakeholders’ websites, social media and other communication channels.

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Background Information

About UNRWA

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA Programme Budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall. UNRWA encourages all Member States to work collectively to exert all possible efforts to fully fund the Agency’s Programme Budget. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals. UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.

For more information, please visit: https://www.unrwa.org

About WDF

The World Diabetes Foundation is an independent trust dedicated to the prevention and treatment of diabetes in the developing world.
Its aim is to alleviate human suffering related to diabetes and its complications among those least able to withstand the burden of the disease. The Foundation supports sustainable partnerships and acts as a catalyst to help others do more. Since 2002, the World Diabetes Foundation provided US$ 122 million in funding to 486 partnership projects in 115 countries, focusing on awareness, education and capacity-building at the local, regional and global level. For every dollar spent, the Foundation is able to raise approximately US$ 2 in cash or as in-kind donations from other sources. The WDF has worked with UNRWA since 2002, funding multiple projects to improve diabetes care for Palestine refugees throughout the region.

For more information, please visit:  
www.worlddiabetesfoundation.org

For further information, contact:

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