

The World populations are aging, positive as it is, however this trend bring about different economic, social and health challenges in terms of ensuring better life conditions to a vulnerable segment namely the older people who need better health care services while, in later life, their income reduces due to retirement.

Ensuring the older people right to sight is a fundamental goal for which all foundations and organizations concerned with both eye care and health of elderly should work together to achieve.

A major step in this direction was taken by the international alliance for vision 2020 initiative that dedicated the world sight day 2008 (9October) to the issue of vision impairment in older people under the slogan "Eye on the future: Fighting vision impairment in later life" The WHO regional Office for the eastern Mediterranean with its partners will observe this occasion in an event due to be held on Thursday 9 October 2008 at its premises in Cairo

80% of people living with blindness are over the age of 50 years and 90% of blind people live in low-income countries, where older people often face barriers to health care.

Cataract remains the leading cause of blindness in older people; yet it can be cured with simple, cost-effective operations, but the cataract surgical rate. Other blinding conditions affecting older people are refractive errors, macular degeneration (AMD) and glaucoma.

Due to the improvement of life style and health care, the world populations are aging, individuals are living longer and blindness from chronic conditions is also rising. As a result, numbers of older people suffering from blindness resulting from chronic diseases , like diabetes are increasing. Sadly enough, around 75 % of blindness cases could have been prevented, treated or cured by cost-effective interventions.

Globally, the world available data indicates that around 314 million people are visually impaired (37 million are blind, 124 million with low vision and 153 million with refractive errors), however, it is unjustifiable or acceptable that the suffering of all these people should continue

Regionally, the situation is no better with around 5.3 million are blind and around 37 million are visually impaired Region. In many countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, including Egypt, where over 700,000 are blind, hundred thousands of people suffer from blindness due to reasons as simple as uncorrected refractive errors, which can be easily diagnosed and corrected by a pair of spectacles, and can restore sight to most of these people.

Nevertheless, significant progress has been achieved on some countries in the Region. Dr Hussein Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean expressed appreciation for the initiative recently announced by H.E. President of Sudan to support over US\$ 30 Million for strengthening eye care and prevention of blindness programme in Sudan. He highlighted another initiative launched by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed Ben Rashed of Dubai to provide eye care services to one million people on H.H personal expenses. The regional Director also acknowledged the steps taken by the Pakistani government to ensure providing eye care to the most deprived and rural areas in the country.

“We need more generous support and contribution from other leaders to eliminate the avoidable blindness in this Region. We note with appreciation the efforts exerted by many partners specially IMPACT –EMR chaired by HRH Prince Abdul Aziz Bin Ahmed al Saud ” Dr Gezairy

said.

“Older people are important members of our families and communities. Vision loss can be difficult for older people to contribute to their full potential. ‘active ageing’ helps older people to keep health, and healthy eyes help older people to stay active. Keeping in mind that “The right to sight” has no age limit” he added

HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Ahmed Al Saud, H.E. Minister of Health and Population, Egypt and HE Minister of Health, Morocco are invited to the celebration along with ambassadors of Gulf countries and other Member States and experts and invitees representing organizations concerned with fighting blindness and providing eye care.

Saturday 17th of May 2025 06:49:14 PM