

14 November 2013 – On World Diabetes Day, 14 November, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) – Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are calling on countries to intensify efforts to prevent and control diabetes and improve access to essential care and medicines for all people with diabetes.

An epidemic of alarming proportion in the Region

Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, points to the enormous burden of diabetes in the Region: “Diabetes is a global challenge but is particularly important for our countries”. According to IDF’s *Diabetes Atlas*, 6 of the 10 countries with the highest rates of prevalence of diabetes in the world are in this Region, where 10% of all adult deaths are due to diabetes. By 2030, the number of people with diabetes in the Region is expected to increase from 32.8 million to 59.7 million.

“The explosion of diabetes in the Region is mainly due to type 2 diabetes,” says Professor Adel El Sayed, IDF Chair of the MENA Region. Once known as “adult-onset” or “noninsulin-dependent” diabetes, it is typically associated with unhealthy environments and lifestyles, and is thus, preventable.

Diabetes is being reported by many countries in the Region at an increasingly young age, with prevalence rates substantially higher than the global average. “A further 24 million people are at high risk of type 2 diabetes from predisposing risk factors, such as impaired glucose tolerance. By 2030, this number is expected to nearly double,” adds Professor El Sayed. Diabetes is highly prevalent among both genders in countries of the Region, ranging from 3.5% to 30%.

Diabetes impacts individuals and countries

Diabetes and its complications have a significant economic impact on individuals, families, health systems and countries. It causes suffering and hardship, and strains the Region’s economies and health systems.

“The diabetes burden to an individual and to society is chiefly associated with increased disability and premature mortality due to its complications, such as cardiovascular disease,” explains Dr Alwan. “Diabetes complications and premature mortality are exacerbated by poor quality of care”.

Evidence shows that people with pre-diabetes, whereby individuals have higher-than-normal blood glucose levels but do not meet criteria for diabetes, are also at increased risk for cardiovascular diseases. Unfortunately, diabetes and pre-diabetes commonly go undetected. Studies have demonstrated that approximately one third of people with type 2 diabetes are undiagnosed, and commonly present with complications at the time of diagnosis. This highlights the importance of screening to detect the disease in its early stages when interventions can have a significant impact in halting disease progression.

Preventing and controlling diabetes

There is much that can be done to prevent diabetes. Countries can implement affordable and effective solutions to reduce the health and financial burden linked to diabetes. “Simple lifestyle measures facilitated by conducive environments have been shown to prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes and its complications,” says Dr Alwan.

“Once diabetes develops,” according to Professor El Sayed, “lifestyle changes must continue, but health care access and quality become important”. Diabetes complications and premature mortality are believed to be exacerbated by poor quality of care. In addition, the risk of dying from cardiovascular disease is 2 to 3 times higher among people with diabetes than those without.

The sheer burden of diabetes highlights the need for partners to work together. “Prevention and control of diabetes requires concerted public health action and close collaboration among international, regional and national partners”, says Dr Alwan. “WHO and the IDF have worked together for many years to support countries to implement effective measures to prevent and control diabetes,” adds Professor El Sayed. Civil society organizations, professional organizations, academia and the private sector also have a pivotal role to play in supporting countries.

Diabetes and the agenda for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases

Diabetes is one of the four main groups of noncommunicable diseases, along with cardiovascular diseases, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases, which cause over 55% of all

deaths in the Region. These diseases share common risk factors, such as tobacco use, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity, and are thus amenable to common interventions.

“The United Nations Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases,” notes Dr Alwan, “provides a vision for action, while the Regional Framework for Action provides a clear roadmap for countries in this Region to prevent and control noncommunicable diseases, including diabetes”.

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About World Diabetes Day

World Diabetes Day raises global awareness of diabetes, its escalating rates around the world and how to prevent the illness in most cases. Initiated by WHO and the IDF, the Day is celebrated on 14 November every year to mark the birth of Frederick Banting who, along with Charles Best, was instrumental in the discovery of insulin in 1922, a life-saving treatment for diabetes patients. To learn more, visit www.idf.org/worlddiabetesday .

About WHO

In the 21st century, health is a shared responsibility, involving equitable access to essential care and collective defence against transnational threats. WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends. To learn more, visit www.who.int .

About the IDF

The IDF is an umbrella organization of over 200 national diabetes associations in over 160

countries. It represents the interests of the growing number of people with diabetes and those at risk. The Federation has been leading the global diabetes community since 1950. IDF's mission is to promote diabetes care, prevention and a cure worldwide. To learn more, visit www.idf.org/

Saturday 27th of April 2024 08:28:27 AM