

17 December 2015 -- In a special multisectoral partnership between health and non-health sectors in Egypt, a new initiative to make use of mobile technology to control diabetes mellitus was launched in Egypt on 29 November 2015. This is a national application of the global programme “Be He@lthy Be Mobile”, also known as “mobile health” (mHealth).

mHealth is an innovative approach that uses mobile technology, in particular text messaging and apps, to provide health care support to patients or technical support to health service providers in a direct, low-cost and engaging manner. This national initiative is the outcome of collaborative work among the Ministry of Health and Population, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the 3 local telecommunication companies together with the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

Mobile health offers a way to reduce health care costs by empowering citizens to intervene in their own health care early by using cost-effective and already existing and widely spread technology; the mobiles. mHealth aims to create mobile health programmes based on scientifically verified knowledge. The initiative will assist governments to use mobile components to reinforce their existing national health activities to prevent, manage and treat noncommunicable diseases and their risk factors. Over the long term, it will contribute with the other cost effective measures to reducing the burden of premature death, disabilities and morbidities by promoting healthier lifestyles.

There is a growing recognition that noncommunicable diseases dominate health care needs and expenditure in Egypt. Noncommunicable diseases are responsible for 84% of all deaths in Egypt and 67% of premature mortality below the age of 70 years. 4 main diseases, cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic lung disease, constitute a great health burden on the national health system. Egypt is among the 5 countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region showing the highest prevalence of diabetes and the largest number of adults with diabetes. About 17% of the adult Egyptian population has raised fasting blood glucose levels and more than 10% has impaired fasting blood glucose (pre-diabetes), which poses a high risk for the development of diabetes if not properly managed. Only 37.6% of the patients are on medication for diabetes, which means that over 60% of diabetics are not under treatment. Fortunately, diabetes and its major complications are largely preventable through highly cost-effective interventions that tackle common behavioural risk factors, including unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and tobacco use.

The introduction of the mHealth initiative for diabetes mellitus (mDiabetes) in Egypt could be an excellent approach to narrow this huge gap in disease management and raising the awareness of the public and patients about the importance of healthy living. mDiabetes will reduce health care costs by empowering citizens to intervene in their own health care early by using cost-effective and popular technology.

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