

Non – communicable diseases and reproductive health

December is the festive season world over and again with us but.... do we ever stop to evaluate the ramifications of the merry making we so anxiously look forward to enjoying? To mention but a few of the associated activities: company parties and cocktails, a sedentary holiday mood, school break after a laborious academic year, the overeating of unchecked diets, alcohol, smoking and sexual behavior tending to crown the peak of this season. This edition of the journal seeks to address and invoke we rethink how this time ought to be spent to ensure that we do not end up with chronic diseases which have deleterious effects in our sexual and reproductive health across the age divide.

Non communicable diseases (NCD's) are the exploding epidemic and among HIV infected persons with opportunistic infections adding fuel to this predicament especially in low resource settings. This group of non – contagious diseases includes among others *cardiovascular disease, cancers, diabetes, chronic respiratory infections, renal disease, osteoporosis, and Alzheimers*. They are largely preventable if risk factors are addressed and if unchecked require protracted treatment and care with progressive debilitation and adverse strain on the cost of health care and National development. Approaches to prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have been elaborated in the political declaration of the UN high-level meeting on NCDs and governments having adopted a goal of 25% reduction in relative mortality from NCDs by 2025 (the 25 by 25 goal) (1).

World Health Organization (WHO) reports NCDs kill more than 36 million people each year. Nearly 80% (29 million) occurring in low- and middle-income, commonly before 60 years of age and with 90% ending in “premature” deaths. Cardiovascular diseases account for most at 17.3 million people annually, followed by cancers (7.6 million), respiratory diseases (4.2 million), and diabetes (1.3 million) (2).

Risk factors include the person's background such as genetics, gender, and exposure to pollutants. Behaviors that include substance use and abuse, sexual ill-health, malnutrition, poor lifestyle and environmental degradation (3). Social determinants of health which are influenced by human, financial and infrastructural resources; their inequity in distribution amongst populace; medical drug supply logistics; gender inequality; politics and the health service delivery system all interplaying in the genesis and propagation of NCD's (4).

Interventions targeting the risk factors could have a significant impact on reducing the burden of chronic diseases worldwide. Screening being an important preventive and health promotive prong necessitates as a gold standard to have high sensitivity and specificity for public health (5). Policies and guidelines as to whom to screen, when to initiate screening and avoiding missed opportunities can only be enhanced by increasing awareness in the patient and the health care provider; having a high index of suspicion during clinical evaluation and upon screening; diagnosis with provision of appropriate timely treatment and care. A multifaceted, multidisciplinary and entrenching the use of technological advances is important. Research is the benchmark upon which disease surveillance, knowledge translation, emergence of treatment protocols and advocacy strategies can be strengthened.

On the backdrop of nutrition, exercise and environmental sustainability amongst the adolescents ensuring health promotion and primary prevention strategies are in place; including provision of an opportunity for behavior change interventions. For pregnant women seeking services it is an opportunity for secondary prevention of chronic diseases and for those who already have; provision of care and treatment to prevent aggravation of the condition and enhance favorable pregnancy outcomes (6). Family planning method choices need to be increasingly related to risk assessment for and presence of NCD's. In the geriatric populace recognizing that screening and management of these conditions should be geared towards having a cost – benefit to the patient and the health delivery system.

The articles described in this edition have topics related to reproductive cancers, their screening, diagnosis and management, sexual health and effects from unplanned pregnancies. It is hoped that as you enjoy this season we become more reflective and advocates for “good cheer in a healthier way”!

A. Kihara, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Nairobi, P. O. Box 19676 – 00202, Nairobi, Kenya. Email: ruby_medical@yahoo.com

References

1. Prof George Alleyne MD a, Agnes Binagwaho MD b c, Prof Andy Haines FMedSci d, Selim Jahan PhD e, Prof Rachel Nugent PhD f, Ariella Rojhani BA g, David Stuckler PhD h, *on behalf*

- of The Lancet *NCD Action Group*. Embedding non-communicable diseases in the post-2015 development agenda *The Lancet*, Volume 381, Issue 9866, Pages 566 - 574, 16 February 2013 doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(12)61806-6
2. Lim SS, Vos T, Flaxman AD, Danaei G, Shibuya K, Adair-Rohani H *et al*. A comparative risk assessment of burden of disease and injury attributable to 67 risk factors and risk factor clusters in 21 regions, 1990-2010: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2010. *Lancet*, 2012; **380**(9859):2224-2260.
 3. Fred powledge. The Millenium assessment. *BioScience*. 2006; **56**(11):880-886. doi: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568\(2006\)56\[880:TMA\]2.0.CO;2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568(2006)56[880:TMA]2.0.CO;2).
 4. ^ a b c d e f Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2008). "Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity Through Action on the Social Determinants of Health" (PDF). World Health Organization. Retrieved 2013-03-27.
 5. Richard Farmer, David Miller, Ross Lawrenson Lecture notes on Epidemiology and public health medicine: chapter 17: screening 4th edition:209-211
 6. Kidwell Drake J for PATH. The growing chronic disease burden: Implications for reproductive health. *Outlook*. 2009;**26**(1).