Bringing Hypertension Care Closer to the Community on World Hypertension Day " >

May 15, 2019

Heart disease is the world’s deadliest non-communicable disease (NCD) and hypertension is its leading risk factor. Every year, over 10 million lives are lost to this ‘silent killer’, so called due to its lack of symptoms.

Sadly, the number of deaths caused by NCDs continues to grow. This rising burden particularly affects low- and middle-income countries, where many healthcare systems are overstretched and often primarily set-up to treat infectious diseases.

Novartis Foundation programs around the world are partnering with low-income communities to improve heart health by bringing care closer to where people live, work, shop, study and play.

Schools children take part in physical education activities as part of the KaziBantu program in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. (Novartis Foundation)

The Better Hearts Better Cities initiative seeks to improve heart health with multisector partners on three continents. In São Paulo, Brazil, the program runs in partnership with the Municipal Health Authorities, and the vast network of community influencers that support it include some of the country’s most-loved institutions.

The Corinthians Football Club brings hypertension awareness to thousands of fans at their stadium on regular match days. Healthy heart messages have featured in samba and poetry competitions, and at Carnival.

Community health worker Coumba Dieng takes blood pressure measurements in Dakar, Senegal. (Carolyn Canham/Novartis Foundation)

Creating sustainable solutions that can have a long-term impact on reducing NCDs requires us to reimagine our approach to care and move away from traditional healthcare settings, such as clinics and hospitals.
In Senegal's capital city, Dakar, the Better Hearts Better Cities initiative, implemented in partnership with IntraHealth International, worked with the government to change policy to allow community health workers to offer blood pressure screening.

Community health worker Coumba Dieng undertakes door-to-door visits, and education and screening among groups such as fishermen and market sellers. If a patient has high blood pressure, she refers them to a hospital. “There has been a very positive reaction in the community and acceptance because there was a gap to fill,” she says.

Digital health is an important enabler to improve and coordinate care. In Ulaanbaatar, Better Hearts Better Cities uses digital technology to simplify processes, enhance quality of care and prevention in the community, and empower patients.

Based on this success, the Novartis Foundation’s local partner, Onom, is engaging the World Bank to scale the digital health solutions nationwide.

A woman measures a man’s blood pressure at a hair salon in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. (Dr. Alex Kumar/Novartis Foundation)

Innovative partnerships are essential to make health care more accessible for people. In Vietnam, the Communities for Healthy Hearts initiative, run in partnership with PATH and local government authorities, brings hypertension detection closer to communities by working with partners from outside the healthcare system to make free screening available in non-traditional but convenient locations, including salons, pharmacies and dental offices.

A licensed chemical seller measures a customer's blood pressure in her shop in Ghana. (Dr. Alex Kumar/Novartis Foundation)

The Community Hypertension-Improvement Project in Ghana also partners with non-traditional healthcare players, such as licensed chemical sellers, to maximize opportunities for people to get their blood pressure measured and know their numbers.

Technology connects people who screen positive for high blood pressure at these screening points with the health care system for confirmation of diagnosis and start or continuation of treatment. SMS messages help patients adhere to medication, diet and exercise regimens – ultimately saving many lives.

Heart disease presents an unprecedented challenge to our health globally, and only by working together across sectors and delivering care closer to where people live, work and play, we can address this challenge.

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