Community-based prevention of non-communicable diseases: The way forward

Monday 19 September 2011, 1:15 – 2:30 pm
United Nations HLM on NCDs
New York City, North Lawn Building, Conference Room 5

Summary report on the side-event

Non-communicable diseases continue to have a heavy toll on people around the world, as 80 percent of deaths occur in the developing world. Late detection, ignorance, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, are all factors that contribute to the magnitude and scale of NCDs worldwide. To find ways to overcome these obstacles, engaging broader community involvement through dialogue and concrete action were the topic of the event at the UN General Assembly High Level Meeting on NCDs.

The event was co-hosted by IFRC and the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (IFPMA).

The objective of the event was to highlight Red Cross Red Crescent and IFPMA member expertise and experience in community level approaches to NCD prevention. The panelists—who represented leaders among Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies, WHO, Private sector and academia—reinforced the call for integrated multi-sectorial and multi-partner NCD prevention initiatives.

The panelists were: Greg Vickery, President of the Australian Red Cross; Dr Daoud Albast, from Qatar Red Crescent Society; Tissa Abeywickrama, Director-General of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society; Ms Anita Stewart, Senior Vice President, Sesame Workshop (IFPMA representative); Dr Poonam Singh, Deputy Regional Director of the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia; and Professor Uwe Reinhardt, Economics and public affairs from Princeton University.

Key messages delivered:

Humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross Red Crescent, whose staff and volunteers work closely with local communities, play an enormous role in bringing about changes in behavior and attitudes towards health and lifestyle. But they cannot bring about change alone. The growing problem of NCDs requires the input and influence of all sectors of our societies. Pharmaceutical companies, whilst concerned with the research and development of new drugs and treatments, have recognized the critical need to address the challenge of the rise in Non-Communicable Diseases in the developing world.
and are focusing their attention on both prevention and better access to treatment. Sesame workshop shows how they can target efficiently children in different context for healthy diet habits.

The world is changing and public and private sector alike recognize that the approach to NCDs must change too. Ten years ago, the world’s decision-makers promised to get tough on the fight against HIV/AIDS. With the lives of another 36 million people at stake, the world urgently need the same political commitment on NCDs.

Greg Vickery, President of the Australian Red Cross shared his experience in working with the Indigenous Australians who remain the most vulnerable to NCDs as they have lower levels of access to health services; they are more likely to be hospitalized for most diseases and conditions, to experience disability and reduced quality of life due to ill health, and to die at younger ages, than other Australians; they also suffer a higher burden of emotional distress and possible mental illness. “Our response is threefold through save-a-mate program tackling the alcohol problem they face; breakfast clubs for a healthy diet and foodcents, i.e. simple strategies to support healthy eating habits. In addition participants learn how to save money on their food bill and increase their economic self-reliance.” Mr Vickery said.

The panel also included Tissa Abeywickrama, Director-General of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society—one of the leading national societies in NCDs response in Southeast Asia. Dr Daoud Albast, from Qatar Red Crescent Society spoke of his experience in tackling NCDs and migrants in Qatar, Dr Poonam Singh, Deputy Regional Director of the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, spoke about importance of investing in health systems and in universal health coverage; delivering effective international aid for NCDs prevention; and improving access to medicines. Ms Anita Stewart, Senior Vice President, Sesame Workshop (IFPMA representative), spoke about a multi-stakeholder response to NCDs targeting children worldwide. Professor Uwe Reinhardt, Economics and public affairs from Princeton University, reminded the audience that part of this community-based effort must be to make the individual be both able and willing to play an active role in the management of his or her own health.

The moderator Ms Tsung-Mei Cheng from Princeton University also invited interventions from the floor. Julia Seyers, medical advisor from the World Medical Association, WHPA secretariat gave a short overview on the launch of a health scorecard for prevention and control of NCDs. “It is a simple, universal educational tool which allows everyone to assess and record their lifestyle/behavioral and biometric risk factors. It helps individuals and their health professional take a proactive approach to prevent NCDs and associated disability.” Ms Seyers said.

**Feedback and results**

The meeting elicited positive responses from the attendance. We were subsequently contacted by:

- Maximilian de Courten MD MPH, Professor Global Public Health, University of Copenhagen, School of Global Health (On management of NCD in Emergencies)
- Ron Kirk, Life University Atlanta, NGO Alliance for Health (NCD and First Aid)
- Edward Ryan, AARP (on NCD prevention among the elderly)