

Global Brief on Hypertension: Silent Killer, Global Public Health Crisis

World Health Day was celebrated on 7 April to mark the anniversary of the foundation of WHO in 1948. Each year a theme is selected for World Health Day that highlights a priority area of public health concern in the world. The theme for 2013 is high blood pressure that describes why, in the early 21st century, hypertension is a global public health issue. This document describes how hypertension contributes to the burden of heart disease, stroke and kidney failure and premature death and disability. The document also explains how hypertension is both preventable and treatable and how governments, health workers, civil society, private health sector, families and individuals can join forces to reduce hypertension and its impact.

Many people do not know that they have high blood pressure because it does not always cause symptoms. As a result, it contributes to more than nine million deaths every year, including about half of all deaths due to heart disease and stroke. It is very easy to reduce the burden of high blood pressure by cutting down on salt; eating a balanced diet; avoiding harmful use of alcohol; doing regular physical activity and avoiding tobacco use. In Japan several community-based non-communicable disease programmes have contributed to a reduction in raised blood pressure and strokes.

Hypertension is estimated to affect more than one in three adults aged 25 and over (or about one billion people) worldwide. Africa sees the highest prevalence of hypertension (46 percent of adults aged 25 and over), while the Americas the lowest (35 percent). Owing to appropriate public policies and better access to health care, high-income countries have a lower prevalence of hypertension (35 percent) than low- and medium-income countries (40 percent).

In India documented prevalence of hypertension may be the tip of the iceberg. Lack of uniform healthcare delivery system, lack of availability and standardised practise of nationalized protocols, poor accessibility of modern health care system for a significant percentage of populations are the main culprits of the expected huge number of hidden hypertensive Indians. These tremendous hidden cases are indirectly influencing the prevalence of disability in our country.

According to this year WHO report, the prevention and control of hypertension requires the efforts from government policy makers, health workers, academic research community, civil society, private sector and families and individuals because all have a role to play. As a part of world health care delivery system let us join hands and share the ultimate goal of World Health Day 2013 to reduce coronary artery diseases and strokes. Specific objectives of our campaign to prevent disability will be:

- to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of high blood pressure;
- to provide information to general population on how to prevent high blood pressure and related complications;
- to encourage adults to check their blood pressure and to follow the advice of health-care professionals;
- to encourage all for healthy diet and regular exercise habit;
- to make blood pressure measurement affordable to all;
- to incite national and local authorities to create environments for healthy behaviours.

In the era of modern medicine of twenty-first centuries we, the physiatrist community of India, should take the call of WHO to resist this silent killer and to encounter the global public health crisis because the physiatrists are not only with the disabled and for the disabled persons but also for the community to prevent disability.

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