

Of the 190,000 Barbadians aged 20 years and older, 90,000 are overweight, 38,000 suffer from hypertension or high blood pressure, 19,000 are diabetic, and one person suffers a stroke every day.

Dr. Hennis, Head of the Chronic Disease Research Centre

ALARMING DEATH RATES

In our region the burden of the chronic non communicable diseases is no less startling, thus for example the CNCDS account for more than half of all deaths in our region, and of these deaths 30 % are due to heart disease. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in 31 of the 35 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, and it is estimated that heart disease will cause 3 times more death and disability than infectious diseases over the next 20 years in this region.

Over the past 50 years here in Barbados, there has been an epidemiological transition in the pattern of disease, changing from infectious and communicable disease to that of non-communicable diseases, which include the 5 leading causes of death in our country. The CNCDS now kill more persons worldwide than malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and several other infectious diseases combined. Indeed the WHO estimates that CNCDS account for 60% of deaths globally and almost half (49.5%) of the global burden of disease.

WHAT ARE CNCDS?

The chronic non-communicable diseases are a group of medical conditions that includes heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, or high blood pressure, obesity, stroke, and some cancers such as of the breast, prostate, and cervix. These conditions share many features. They develop over relatively long periods initially without causing any symptoms after which evidence of disease occurs with protracted periods of ill health, impairment of quality of life, and premature death. **Chronic non-communicable diseases** may be controlled and their onset delayed. They are partly genetic and lifestyle related with the diseases occurring in middle or older age after prolonged exposure to modifiable lifestyle behaviours and environmental risk factors. Lack of physical activity, high caloric intake, increased consumption of foods high in fat content, and tobacco smoking all contribute to large numbers of the population being diagnosed with the above disorders.

DEVELOPMENT COST

The CNCDS have the potential to affect every individual, every family and every community directly or indirectly, and by extension can impact significantly on the socio-economic development of Barbados.

In terms of cost, it is estimated that more than 65% of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital's budget provides for CNCD care, in the 6 month period April-October 2004 the Barbados Drug Service paid out approximately 16 million on drugs used in the treatment of CNCDs. Indirect costs for diabetes, i.e. loss of productivity, sickness benefits, and loss of earnings due to premature death have been calculated at more than 138 million US dollars annually.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Despite the many challenges, there is nevertheless much that can be done to slow and delay the epidemic of the CNCDs. This requires two approaches, firstly, a reduction in the modifiable risk factors for chronic non-communicable diseases thus leading to postponing of these diseases resulting in healthier older people, and secondly, establishment of cost effective programmes to treat the chronic non-communicable diseases when they do occur.

GOVERNMENT ACTION

The Ministry of Health has over the past several years attempted to deal with the chronic noncommunicable diseases by establishing treatment programmes, and addressing the modifiable risk factors for the Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases; and in its Barbados Strategic Plan for Health, 2002-2010 identified Tackling of the Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases as a national priority. In 2004 the Ministry of Health published a defining document titled **Strategy for the Prevention and Control of CNCDs** which called for among other things the establishment of a CNCD Commission. In the following year a Ministry of Health sponsored **International Consultation on a Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases for Barbados**, was held.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMISSION

In January the health Ministry established the National Chronic Non- Communicable Diseases Commission which consists of 18 members whose expertise and disciplines are gathered from a wide cross section of the community. The National CNCD Commission's mandate will be to develop and promote well planned strategies for the control of CNCDs with specific emphasis on an inter-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach. It will advise the Ministry of Health on CNCD policies and legislation, e.g. in relation to food availability, workplace issues, measures to increase participation in physical activity and tobacco control. The Commission will be the focal point of activity drawing on the expertise and disciplines from all aspects of society; forming partnerships with the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Finance, Corporate Barbados, Non-governmental Organisations, the Audiovisual and print media and community groups. It is anticipated that urgent areas to be addressed will be risk reduction, evaluation and planning, education and information systems.

“The Commission has the potential to serve as a focal point, be an umbrella body, a national resource, facilitator, an advocacy body, and an instrument for positive change aimed at slowing and delaying the onset of the epidemic of the chronic non-communicable diseases.”

Professor Trevor Hassell, Chairman of the National Chronic Non-communicable Diseases Commission

A CNCD REGISTRY

In addition to the commission, the ministry of Health in Barbados is the first in the Eastern Caribbean to establishment a CNCD Registry. By documenting the incidence, natural history and outcomes of cases of CNCDs the ministry will be more effective in planning policies and programmes based on evidence. Within recent time there have been major concerns about the lack of sufficient data and information to guide financial, human resource and social policies. Other initiatives that have been implemented include the establishment of a Health Promotion Unit and the creation of the post Senior Medical health Officer with responsibility for the CNCDs.

SMART PARTNERSHIPS

To further strengthen the evidence base for action on CNCDs, the Ministry of Health and the **Barbados Statistical Service (BSS)** have conducted a Behavioural Risk Factor Survey which investigates lifestyle habits including diet, physical activity, smoking and other health seeking behaviours among a sample of the population. Through this key alliance with the BSS, it is anticipated that such data will be collected on a continuous basis.

The findings of this risk factor survey, together with the output of the CNCD Registry will help to provide a more complete picture of the CNCD situation, its effects on the population and the barriers which limit a positive response to the many behavioural interventions that have been implemented over the years. In the medium to long term these findings will guide the work of the National CNCD Commission.

The Ministry of Health has also sought a strategic partnership with the **Chronic Disease Research Centre (CDRC) of the University of the West Indies** to establish the registry. This major undertaking was made feasible through the commitment and willingness of the UWI and the CDRC in particular. Over the years the CDRC has demonstrated that it has the expertise and international recognition to execute such programmes. One only has to recall the Barbados Stroke Register as but one recent example of the Centre's work and demonstration of its capabilities. It is anticipated that this collaborate between the two agencies will ensure that the management of CNCD in Barbados is carried out in accordance with internationally established standards and will be viewed a best practice model for small developing states.

In this age when governmental institutions are called on to provide more and more sophisticated services to the population, with limited resources, outsourcing of specific tasks to reputable and distinguished organisations go a long way to provide such services that are deemed necessary.

The outsourcing of services with sound service level agreements will be an option for many health sector projects and programmes in the future. The Ministry of Health has already entered into an agreement with **The Heart and Stroke Foundation** of Barbados for the provision of cardiac rehabilitation services to persons requiring such, especially those who would otherwise be unable to afford such services.

FUNDING

The European Development Fund (EDF) has provided much of the technical expertise and resources to the above initiatives. Through the programme, the Government of Barbados has access to Bds\$25 million in general budget support for the Ministry of Health. The package will allow the Ministry of Health to adopt a vast array of strategies identified in the Barbados Strategic Plan for Health 2002-2012, which was reviewed recently at a National Policy Review Forum. The EDF Programme will also ensure the fulfilment of priority areas established under the Caribbean Cooperation for Health Initiative Phase III.

The Ministry of Health continues to work with national, regional and international partners to support the advancement of healthcare delivery in Barbados.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

2007 was designated as **the National Year of Promotion of Good Health and Wellness**. This concept is consistent with the Ministry of Health's vision of healthy people in a healthy nation. The main purpose of this designation is to focus national attention on healthy lifestyle behaviours and to help individuals make small but impactful changes to their daily eating and physical activity routine, in order to improve their overall health status. Soon to be published will be a calendar of events, a public relations and sensitization campaign. Government Ministries and departments, private sector entities, and non-governmental organizations will be encouraged to identify their own "local" or in-house champions who will rally co-workers to become involved. The ministry is encouraging all sectors of society, private, public, faith-based and other community groups, to embrace this concept and plan activities to compliment the events of the year.