

LETTERS

NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

Requirements for global prevention and control of non-communicable diseases

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The *BMJ* recently published two different takes on non-communicable diseases (NCDs). One article discussed how to reduce this global problem; the other questioned the size of the problem and suggested undue influence of big pharma in presenting the figures.^{1 2}

I hold no brief for the drug industry but must point out that no single organisation determines the NCD Alliance's policy. No commercial organisations participated in the recent Moscow global ministerial meeting, which formulated the Moscow Declaration for presentation to the September UN summit on prevention and control of NCDs.³

Cheap generic drugs must be widely available to combat NCDs; this requires support from the drug industry. Similarly, achieving dietary change requires the food industry's support.

The sheer size of the global NCD problem makes it of prime importance. Of course, extending lifespan increases the likelihood of developing NCDs, but reducing overall mortality and morbidity from chronic diseases at any age must be valuable.

The aim is to reduce the incidence of NCDs in high, medium, and low income countries. This must entail a financial cost.

Savings in reduced cost of prolonged morbidity and reduced sickness absence will far outweigh these costs.⁴

Without political will, global availability of improved healthcare facilities, involvement of civil society and the corporate sector, and international collaboration, primary care will be unable to translate these aims into practical measures.

Global measures require global application of universal standards and methods, with local modifications when necessary. To achieve reduced levels of illness and death requires general acceptance of common criteria, based on WHO protocols.⁵

Competing interests: HML is a member of the Non-Communicable Diseases Alliance.

- 1 UnitedHealth, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Centers of Excellence. Global response to non-communicable disease. *BMJ* 2011;342:d3823. (30 June.)
- 2 Heath I. Seeming virtuous on chronic diseases. *BMJ* 2011;343:d4239. (8 July.)
- 3 First Global Ministerial Conference on Healthy Lifestyles and NCD Control, April 2011.
- 4 National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. Public health guidance 25. 2010:43-4. <http://guidance.nice.org.uk/PH25/Guidance/pdf/English>.
- 5 WHO. Prevention of cardiovascular disease: pocket guidelines for assessment and management of cardiovascular risk. 2007. www.who.int/cardiovascular_diseases/guidelines/PocketGL.ENG.LISH.AFR-D-E.rev1.pdf.

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