

Using the Instruments of Research as a Tool in Alleviating the Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases

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Short Communication

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are presently emerging as major problems globally, as disease rates from NCDs are generally on the increase, advancing across regions and social classes [1]. According to the World Health Report [2], five out of the ten leading global disease burden risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, physical inactivity and unhealthy diet. These preventable risk factors, together with alcohol and tobacco use, play a key role in the development of chronic diseases [3]. There is a consensus that global and region-specific estimates of the burden of NCDs may not reflect the health problems faced by the entire world; as poor people face the greatest threats to their health [4]. One of the drivers of most the biological determinants of NCDs includes rural–urban migration, which may be an important factor in promoting the adoption of Western dietary habits and activity patterns, leading to an increased risk of NCDs [4].

Understanding the biological determinants of NCDs is useful for their prevention. It is therefore important to increase the chances of modifying these risk factors. Although, effective forms of prevention and treatment for many NCDs are available in the literature, efforts should still be made to increase the availability data on the modification of the risk factors to NCDs. As the saying goes, “prevention is much better than cure”, nobody should therefore be denied access to these data. Non-communicable diseases have been reported to make significant demands on health resources [5]. The combined impact of these conditions on global health is dramatic and on the increase: Of 57 million global deaths in 2008, 36 million, or 63%, were due to NCDs, particularly from the four main NCDs, namely cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes and chronic lung diseases [6]. Deaths attributable to NCDs are projected to increase 15% globally between 2010 and 2020. This burden of disease is likely to increase enormously over the coming decades and based on the current trends, by the year 2020 NCDs are expected to account for 73% of deaths and 60% of the global burden of disease [7].

The risk factors for many of these NCDs are preventable and challenge health professionals to become involved in the

monitoring of these emerging health issues in order to implement successful health promotion programs. Physiotherapists, as part of the health team should be ready to take up the responsibility of tackling these burdens of NCDs, in addition to that of communicable diseases.

Physiotherapy is both a curative and preventive discipline and forms an integral part of the health care system globally. It is a profession with core values in movement and exercise; and is in the best position to tackle the key elements that underlies all NCDs. Therefore, there is a need to develop additional roles such as being educator/motivator of our patients, and researcher in addition to being a clinical practitioner. Physiotherapists can make a major cost-effective contribution to the prevention, control and management of NCDs. Physiotherapists can adequately help address the challenges of NCDs in a number of ways: By promoting lifestyle changes with an emphasis on physical activity; this calls for a paradigm shift from curative services to preventive services, through the use of cutting-edge researches. Thus, flooding the data bases with clinically enhanced researches will further encourage “Evidenced Based Physiotherapy” among physiotherapy clinicians. There is no doubt that NCDs continue to be a priority globally, and it would be a serious mistake to ignore their prevention and control, with respect to flooding the literature with head-cutting research renovation to enhance practice.

There are problem militating against the readiness in putting research into practice, as well as accessing the published materials. This is of particularly importance to researchers from low income country. Unfortunately, physiotherapy researchers are not immune from the challenges faced by researchers generally. This is majorly in the area of access to the available evidence, and this is of particular importance in the developing countries.

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