

Do not ignore symptoms

Improve lifestyle

Avoid stress

Break stereotypes, it also happens to the rich

Eat healthy

Test your blood sugar level

Engage in physical activity

Spread awareness

#WHD2016

#BeatDiabetes



Diseased with Diabetes – Celebrating World Health Day 2016

This Special Series celebrates Nepal's efforts towards diabetes control. Through this document, we reflect back how diabetes is emerging as a danger particularly in increasing urbanisation and consequent changes in our lifestyle. We also take a closer look into our policy frameworks about non-communicable diseases in Nepal. Perspectives of the practitioners and the patients about how they view about the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases, particularly diabetes are also documented. There are emerging challenges – especially creating public awareness regarding non-communicable diseases, making treatment more accessible, cost effective and patient friendly. It is high time we get united in this common endeavour towards beating diabetes.

Introduction

Every year the World Health Day is marked on April 7, to raise awareness and draw attention about various global health issues. This year, the focus is on diabetes which has increased rapidly mostly in low and middle income countries. The day is being observed with a slogan, '**Scale up diabetes prevention, strengthen care, and enhance surveillance**'. Currently, it is estimated that there are over **260 million people worldwide with diabetes** with **65,000 new cases of diabetes** being diagnosed each year.

Nepal is facing increasing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and injuries. NCDs account for more than 44% of deaths and 80% of outpatient contacts. **In 2015, 526,000 cases of diabetes was reported which is said to rise up to 1,328,000 by 2030.** Prevalence of diabetes in adults (20-79 years) was 3.3% in 2015. Diabetes claimed 11,700 adult deaths last year. 32 % of cases of diabetes in adults of Nepal were undiagnosed and the cost per person with diabetes was 68.5 USD. The percentage of diabetic patients has increased from 19% in 2002 to 26% in 2009 in Nepal and is continuously growing ever since. A study reported the prevalence of pre-diabetes to diabetes in Nepal to be 19.5% to 9.5%. The Nepal Diabetes Association (NDA) had reported a year back that among people aged 20 years and older living in urban areas, 15% are affected by this disease. Among people aged 40 years and older in urban areas, this number climbed to 19%. NDA reported that diabetes affects approximately 15% of people of more than 20 years and 19% of people of more 40 years of age in urban areas and up to 95% of diabetic patients were reported to be type 2 diabetes.

Policy Perspectives on Diabetes Control Approaches in Nepal

The government has made various efforts to curb NCDs. The National Health Policy 2014, which ensured quality and accessible health service to every citizen as well as provision of free basic health service. Likewise, The Urban Health Policy has focused on the prevention and control of NCDs.

Key features of **NCD Action Plan for Prevention and Control for NCDs in Nepal 2014 – 2020:**

Vision: All people of Nepal enjoy the highest attainable status of health, well-being and quality of life at every age, free of preventable NCDs, avoidable disability and premature death

Goal: Reduce preventable morbidity, avoidable disability and premature mortality due to NCDs in Nepal

Specific Objectives:

1. To raise the priority accorded to the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases in the national agendas and policies according to international agreed development goals through strengthened international cooperation and advocacy
2. To strengthen national capacity, leadership, governance, multi-sectoral action and partnership to accelerate country response for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases
3. To reduce modifiable risk factors for non-communicable diseases and underlying social determinants through creation of health-promoting environments
4. To strengthen and orient health systems to address the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases and underlying social determinants through people centered primary health care and universal health coverage.

5. To promote and support national capacity for high quality research and development for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases
6. To monitor the trends and determinants of non-communicable diseases and evaluate progress in their prevention and control

The Country Action Plan also relies on the following overarching principles and approaches:

- Focus on equity
- Multi-sectoral actions and multi-stakeholder engagement
- Life course approach
- Balance between population based and individual approaches
- Empowerment of people and communities
- Health system strengthening
- Universal Health Coverage
- Evidence-based strategies
- Management of real, perceived or potential conflicts of interest

Nepal Health Sector Strategy 2015-2020 has also envisioned for Improved Healthy Lifestyles and Environment as one of the nine outcomes. According to the strategy, **“Innovative approaches will be strengthened for behaviour-change that target specific behaviours (i.e. smoking, alcohol consumption, health seeking behaviour) and conditions (e.g. obesity) for addressing increasing trends in non-communicable diseases, mental and sexual health problems. Where appropriate, locally appropriate and innovative approaches for BCC and IEC will be designed and implemented.”**

Practitioner's Perspective

HERD team caught up with Dr Manil Ratna Bajracharya at Bir Hospital (the oldest hospital in Nepal and the hospital having highest number of patient flow) while he was serving the patients in the OPD Section of the hospital. Dr Bajracharya is a Diabetes and Endocrinology specialist. He presented his views about the situation and challenges of NCDs in Nepal:



Increasing disease burden: Among various NCDs, the burden of diabetes is very high especially in the urban areas with rapid rural to urban migration. The level of public awareness has increased comparatively and media has played a very important role in sensitising about the issue. At least one person from every household has suffered from diabetes. This has also raised awareness and concern regarding the disease. For the patients with low economic status who are working on a daily wage basis and do not have a permanent job or health insurance have extra financial burden.

Role of education important: Education plays an important role for prevention as well as treatment of the disease. If we can provide education about the disease, we will be able to raise awareness,

promote healthy lifestyle and apply various preventive measures in order to stop the disease occurrence at the pre-diabetic phase itself.

Current trend of diabetes: Currently, the disease is being seen in people less than 40 years of age while previously it was mostly seen in elderly people. Treatment is available in many places throughout the country. There are many doctors even at the rural areas where the patients get basic services like medicine and insulin, but for comprehensive treatment, they have to come to the cities. Many Diabetes Centres have been established. For treatment, the flow of patients has been increasing. The government has now included diabetes in its policies and programmes. Similarly, basic medicine for diabetes and blood pressure are provided free of cost. Senior citizens can conduct sugar level and blood test free of cost. Now the government has focused on elderly diabetic patients. Some people who are unable to bear the treatment cost are also getting free services by showing some documents.

Way Forward: The government needs to have a prevention policy for diabetes. Awareness campaigns need to inform the vulnerable and unreached population. A mechanism has to be introduced where patients will be provided with minimum care, medicine and provide subsidized service considering the financial situation of the patient. As the patients require various levels of support, government in coordination with various NGOs and private sector should perform a supportive role. People suffer from diseases, problems arise but we should work towards preventing it. When one suffers from a disease, we should provide them with the necessary services. **If we are able to stop diabetes and its complications, we can win over the disease.**

Patients' Perspectives

Sangeeta Tuladhar, 45 of Naya Bazaar, Kathmandu has been suffering from diabetes since last four years. She has been taking medicine continuously. She shares, **“When you suffer from any disease, I think instead of allowing the disease to change your lifestyle, it is better you change it yourself”**. Food habits, daily activities, exercise is something that has to kept under special consideration when you are suffering from diabetes.”

Sangeeta's mother also had diabetes. Her mother knew about the disease, so she noticed the symptoms and asked Sangeeta to do a check-up. She suggests, “One should be alert and check blood sugar level time and again. If done so, the disease is detected on time and one can begin treatment early”.

Daulat Tamang, 79 of Pipaltar, Kavrepalanchowk did not know he was suffering from diabetes until last year. He used to show signs of diabetes but it remained unnoticed. There was no family history of the disease. As the symptoms started becoming severe, he came to Kathmandu for checkup where he was informed that he had diabetes.

Tamang claims that his food habits lifestyle have changed a lot. He used to be an alcoholic and used to smoke as well. Now he has stopped it as per the suggestion of the doctors and is strictly following a healthy diet. He has been coming to Kathmandu every month for the checkup. He says, **“I have no idea**



how I suffered from the disease. May be I got the disease because of my eating habits as I didn't eat on time. I also think it occurred due to weakness, as I live alone and have to do all the work".

His economic condition is very poor. The doctors suggested him to get the medicine which is free of cost but was not available at the pharmacy within the hospital. So he was forced to pay for it in another pharmacy. He complained that he didn't get the facility which the government has provided for free. He has been getting the treatment at Bir Hospital. Tamang's house was destroyed at the earthquake. He received 10,000 rupees from the government for reconstruction which he has been using to come to Kathmandu for checkup.

HERD Staff's Views

We also talked to some of the HERD staff to gather their views about situation and challenges of NCDs and diabetes in Nepal:

Dr Sushil Baral, Executive Chairperson: Globally, as well as in the context of Nepal, disease burden of NCDs is increasing due to changing lifestyle patterns. Government of Nepal especially needs to focus on prioritising NCDs not just in policy but also in practice. There needs to be proper allocation of resources – including human resources that addresses the current and possible future challenges with regards to NCDs through robust structures and mechanisms in place. **Multi-sectoral approach is the key here – with the government joining hands with private sector, NGOs/INGOs, civil society and the media** to execute policies, plans and programmes on NCDs in an effective manner.



Deepak Joshi, Senior Officer, Research Monitoring and Evaluation: Considering the current context there is a bigger challenge. Readiness of the health system still needs to be strengthened to cure NCDs. NCDs have not yet fallen in our priority as in the context of developing countries like Nepal implies triple burden of disease. The health workers are not well trained to cure NCDs. The diagnosis and lab services are very few, there is no provision of a proper diagnostic service. Numerous people are dying unknowingly. **The scenario of diabetes that we are seeing now is just the tip of the iceberg; we do not know lies beneath.** To tackle the disease, our health system should be strengthened. It is a must to timely assess the risk behaviour of the population. There is a need to conduct diagnostic survey time and again to know where we stand and what has to be done further.

Ian Walker, Visiting Research Fellow and Specialty Registrar in Public Health: The treatment cost for diabetes is a main concern. It is also associated with other health issues, patients might lose their sight and their limbs may be affected due to which their legs may be amputated. It all **affects the working capacity and earning capacity of a person.** Organizing awareness



campaigns and making the provision of quality service will help a lot. As diabetes invites hypertension, the government can also provide an opportunity for screening and treatment for hypertension.



Himanshu Rayamajhi, Project Support Officer: Diabetes brings a lot of challenges, socio-economic burden of the family increases, maintaining healthy diet becomes difficult and regular work is hampered. It is very important to raise awareness from the grass-root level. I think that concerned bodies should **focus on raising awareness using mass media and volunteers.**

Uden Maharjan, Project Coordinator - Urban Health: The burden of NCDs has increased in the urban areas. **Diabetes has not invited threats but it has become a threat.** Diabetes is being detected at an early age, the economically active population is seen suffering from the disease. It is very important to promote healthy life from the school level by including the topic in the health education syllabus. Government should promote healthy lifestyle instead of fast food and processed food. However, it also depends upon individuals, in terms of their realisation to lead a healthy life.



Dipendra Kumar Das, Office Support Staff: Diabetes control and prevention has become quite a challenge. It has affected the lifestyle of mainly urban residents. One should **promote healthy diet, increase physical activities and consult the doctor regularly.** In order to prevent and control diabetes, it is very important to recognize the population most vulnerable to the disease. It will help in making a treatment plan for the government.

Sangeeta Khimbanjar, Project Officer: Diabetes has been inviting other NCDs too. Physical activity is seen very less in the current generation. The food intake has been increasing and the calories are not burnt. Instead of eating high fiber food, the trend of processed food has been increasing. It has become very important to **provide nutritional education and inform people how diet helps prevent diabetes.** If the patient is provided counselling regarding the importance of nutritional food while visiting doctor, it will be very helpful.



Smriti Maskey, Assistant Research Officer: Diabetes creates several complications like heart disease, kidney problems and other infections. It also affects our lifestyle. Due to the increasing physical inactivity, the incidence of diabetes has been increasing lately. Obesity has been increasing. If we **make the physical activity and diet practice better, it will help maintain cholesterol and blood sugar level.** This should be started individually. Awareness has to be raised and symptoms should not be ignored.

Tips for Diabetes Control and Prevention

Some of the tips that can help in control and prevention of diabetes are presented below:



Major Diabetic Centres in Kathmandu

Based on our online search about diabetic centres in Kathmandu, basic information of major health facilities providing diabetes diagnosis and treatment services is presented below:

1. **Diabetes and Endocrinology Care Center**
Kupondole, Lalitpur (01 5524452)
2. **Grande International Hospital**
Dhapasi, Kathmandu (01 5159267)
3. **Kathmandu Diabetes and Thyroid Center**
Jawlakhel, Kathmandu
4. **Diabetes, Thyroid and Endocrinology Care Center**
Kupondole, Kathmandu (01 5011604, 01 5011557)
5. **Metropolyclinic**
Thapathali Chowk, Kathmandu (01 4100506, 01 4100507)
6. **Nepal Cardio Diabetes and Thyroid Center**
Lazimpat Marg, Kathmandu (01 4432706)
7. **Kathmandu Kidney and Diabetes Center**
Narayanchaur, Naxal, Kathmandu (01 4430206)
8. **Norvic Hospital**
Thapathali, Kathmandu (01 4258554, 01 4252922)
9. **Om Hospital and Research Center**
Chabahil, Kathmandu (01 4482484)
10. **Advanced Polyclinic**
Pani Pokhari, Lazimpat, Kathmandu (01 4431078)
11. **Alka Hospital**
Jawlakhel, Kathmandu (01 5555555, 01 5544477)
12. **Meridian Clinic**
Maharajung, Kathmandu
13. **SR Kedia Diabetes Hospital**
Solatee Mode, Kathmandu (01 2022325)
14. **Nidan Hospital**
Pulchowk, Lalitpur, Kathmandu (01 5531822, 01 5531297)
15. **Sahara Care Hospital**
Maharajung, Kathmandu (01 4410245)
16. **Grande City Clinic And Hospital**
Kantipath, Kathmandu (01 4163500, 01 4163700)
17. **Vayodha Hospital**
Balkhu Chowk, Kathmandu (01 4286426)
18. **Blue Cross Hospital**
Tripureshwor, Kathmandu (01 4262027, 01 4265927)
19. **TU Teaching Hospital**
Maharajung, Kathmandu (01 4410911)
20. **Bir Hospital**
Tundikhel, Kathmandu
21. **Patan Hospital**
Lagankhel, Satdobato, Kathmandu (015522295)
22. **Chirayu National Health and Research Center**
New Baneshwor, Kathmandu
23. **Forever Diabetes Care**
Sankhamul, New Baneshwor, Kathmandu
24. **Nobel Hospital**
Sinamangal, Kathmandu
25. **Capital Hospital**
Putalisadak, Kathmandu

- 26. Chirayu National Health and Research Center**
New Baneshwor, Kathmandu
- 27. Anamnagar Polyclinic and Research Center**
Anamnagar, Kathmandu
- 28. Diyas Hospital**
Bhainsepati, Kathmandu
- 29. Everest International Clinic**
Balkhu, Kathmandu
- 30. Global Hospital**
Gwarko, Lalitpur, Kathmandu
- 31. Grace Hospital**
Chabahil, Kathmandu
- 32. Green Medical Center**
Maharajung, Kathmandu
- 33. HAMS Hospital**
Buddhanagar, Kathmandu
- 34. Himal International Medical Center**
Tripureshwor, Kathmandu
- 35. Pashupati Health Care Center**
Battisputali, Kathmandu
- 36. People's General Hospital**
Nayabazar, Kathmandu
- 37. Prime Med International**
Bagbazar, Kathmandu

Way Forward

To address the problem of diabetes, more effective health care system and access to proper medication is required. Awareness regarding diabetes and its prevention should be conducted with a more targeted approach with effective mass media campaigns, reaching out to not only the poor and excluded but also the well-to-do class. Avoiding diabetes also involves improving the eating habits and maintaining proper diet. Intake of food needs to be balanced. Exercise and physical activities can help control the level of diabetes throughout Nepal.

Various types of promotions and subsidies in medication may be required if this problem is to be tackled effectively. The medications are usually expensive and inaccessible to the poor people. Therefore, the availability of such medicines should be ensured and at a relatively lower cost. Strict punishments and legal provisions are also required to discourage smoking and drinking of alcohol. To curb this scourge of diabetes, public health interventions are required to prevent diabetes or at least delay its complications. Intensive lifestyle modification is vital for those at risk of diabetes and aggressive treatment is required for those with the disease.

A high risk approach targeting individual at risk of diabetes and a population or public health approach aimed at reducing the risk factors for diabetes at the community are necessary. Knowledge is the greatest weapon in the fight against diabetes. Information can help people assess their risk of diabetes, motivate them to seek proper treatment and care, and inspire them to take care of their health. It is

therefore in the interest of the country to design and develop a comprehensive health promotion strategy for diabetes mellitus and its related risk factors. It is equally important to design and implement suitable diagnostic, management and treatment protocols for people with diabetes.

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