

Editorial

Hypertension in Pakistan: What are we going to do about it?

Ever since the very early population surveys done by the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases Karachi in the sixties, there has been data available suggesting the very high prevalence of hypertension in Pakistan. These initial surveys were supplemented by other surveys done three decades ago by the PMRC and other individual workers, also suggesting the high prevalence of hypertension being around 10% of the general adult population of Pakistan. The surveys in school children and in special populations like shopkeepers and armed forces personnel added important information and again subscribed to the high prevalence of hypertension in the general public in Pakistan.

The recent PMRC Pakistan health survey has come out with, for the first time in the history of the country, definitive and representative data from all parts of Pakistan. The prevalence of hypertension seen in various populations and sub-populations has reconfirmed the impressions by the earlier surveys that hypertension is a very common disorder in Pakistan. Because this survey also looked at other chronic health problems it provides for the first time in the history of the country conclusive data that hypertension is now the number one chronic ailment affecting the general population in all four provinces, in men and in women, in children and in adults and in urban and rural populations everywhere. The prevalence of around 10% of the entire population of Pakistan and about 20% of the population over the age 15 and 1/3 of the population over the age of 45 is higher than in most parts of the world. Our initial estimates and fears about cardiovascular diseases being the main cause of adult morbidity and mortality now stands confirmed for the first time in the fifty years history of Pakistan.

Where do we go from here? The problem and the challenge has been identified, the resources and limitations of the health delivery system and the general health and social indicators of Pakistan are well-known. What then is going to be the strategy to address this epidemic that is upon us?

It is apparent that within the resources available to us, curative efforts to control the disease once established will never be adequate. It is imperative especially for poor country like Pakistan to launch a mass preventive effort. Sporadic efforts have been made in the past towards general population education, however, these are very inadequate. It is high time that the Government of Pakistan and each and every medical and citizen body play its part in the mass education effort that will be needed to create an awareness about hypertension, its prevention, its detection and, its adequate treatment. The recent effort to bring the entire citizenry and the medical community of Pakistan on a single platform to fight this epidemic has been made by the organization of the Pakistan Hypertension League.

The problem has been identified. The seriousness of the challenge is defined. The efforts needed and the limitations of what is possible is known to us. The medical community, the Government of Pakistan and the citizenry of Pakistan must now come up to the challenge.

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