

World Hypertension Day and global awareness

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The World Health Organization attributes hypertension, or high blood pressure, as the leading cause of cardiovascular mortality. The World Hypertension League (WHL), an umbrella organization of 85 national hypertension societies and leagues, recognized that more than 50% of the hypertensive population worldwide are unaware of their condition. To address this problem, the WHL initiated a global awareness campaign on hypertension in 2005 and dedicated May 17 of each year as World Hypertension Day (WHD). Over the past three years, more national societies have been engaging in WHD and have been innovative in their activities to get the message to the public. In 2007, there was record participation from 47 member countries of the WHL. During the week of WHD, all these countries – in partnership with their local governments, professional societies, nongovernmental organizations and private industries – promoted hypertension awareness among the public through several media and public rallies. Using mass media such as Internet and television, the message reached more than 250 million people. As the momentum picks up year after year, the WHL is confident that almost all the estimated 1.5 billion people affected by elevated blood pressure can be reached. The success of WHD is due to the enthusiasm and voluntary action of multiple stakeholders from every member country.

Key Words: *Activities; Awareness; Hypertension; Media; World Hypertension Day*

Several surveys from many countries around the world pointed out that the public's awareness of their blood pressure levels was very poor (1-9). Even in highly developed, resource-rich countries with high-quality health care systems, such as Canada, awareness of hypertension was only 58% (8). As many of the developing countries transition from infectious to degenerative chronic diseases, the prevalence of hypertension is increasing (10). At the same time, public awareness of hypertension in these low- and middle-income countries is quite dismal (11). The 2002 World Health Report (12) stated that hypertension is the leading cause of death worldwide.

Epidemiological studies (13-15) have clearly shown that hypertension is a 'silent killer', with no warning signs. Therefore, knowing that one's blood pressure is elevated allows that individual to take some action to mitigate the rising blood pressure, thus preventing potential end-organ damage, including myocardial infarction, kidney failure and cerebrovascular stroke. There is, however, a continued myth among most of the world's population – among both the well educated and the less educated – that not knowing the condition is 'bliss'. On the contrary, a number of studies have shown that early diagnosis and treatment of hypertension leads to better quality of life and increased longevity.

WORLD HYPERTENSION DAY

The World Hypertension League (WHL), an umbrella organization of national hypertension societies and leagues with 85 countries as its

La Journée mondiale de l'hypertension artérielle et la sensibilisation planétaire

L'Organisation mondiale de la santé établit l'hypertension comme la principale cause de mortalité cardiovasculaire. La Ligue mondiale contre l'hypertension (LMH), un organisme parapluie qui regroupe 85 sociétés et ligues nationales contre l'hypertension, convient que plus de 50 % de la population hypertendue du monde n'ont pas conscience de leur état. Pour affronter ce problème, la LMH a lancé une campagne de sensibilisation mondiale sur l'hypertension en 2005 et a désigné le 17 mai comme Journée mondiale de l'hypertension artérielle (JMHA). Depuis trois ans, un nombre croissant de sociétés nationales a adhéré à la LMH et organisé des activités novatrices pour transmettre leur message au public. En 2007, on a constaté la participation record de 47 pays membres de la LMH. Pendant la semaine de la JMHA, tous ces pays, en partenariat avec leurs gouvernements locaux, leurs sociétés professionnelles, leurs organismes non gouvernementaux et l'industrie privée, ont sensibilisé le public à l'hypertension au moyen de diverses actions médiatiques et publiques. À l'aide de médias de masse comme Internet et la télévision, le message a atteint plus de 250 millions de personnes. L'initiative prend de l'ampleur année après année, et la LMH est persuadée qu'il est possible d'atteindre presque tous les 1,5 milliard de personnes qu'on estime atteintes d'hypertension. Le succès de la JMHA est attribuable à l'enthousiasme et à l'action volontaire de multiples intervenants de chaque pays membre.

members, initiated World Hypertension Day (WHD) in 2005. The objective of WHD is to communicate to the public the importance of hypertension and its serious medical complications, and to provide information on prevention, detection and treatment. The WHL launched its first WHD on May 14, 2005. Since 2006, the WHL has been dedicating May 17 of every year as WHD. Many of the member countries have embraced the idea and have been carrying out a number of activities in their respective countries to promote awareness of hypertension (16,17). Such activities included newspaper articles, media coverage, rallies, public forums and mass public physical activities, as well as involvement of politicians, policy makers and popular public figures.

The theme for each WHD is selected by the WHL executive and council members to promote WHD objectives:

- 2005 Awareness of hypertension
- 2006 Prevent hypertension – 'treat to goal'
- 2007 Healthy diet – healthy blood pressure
- 2008 Measure your blood pressure...at home

WHD has caught the imagination of several member countries of the WHL. In most countries, there is a strong partnership between a number of stakeholders that has been built to promote awareness. Such partnership includes, but is not limited to, academia, professional societies, governments, industry and nongovernmental organizations. With the involvement of many sectors, the message is promoted very widely.

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TABLE 1
Activities around World Hypertension Day in the World Hypertension League member countries

Country	Media					Political promotion	Blood pressure screening	Symposium/ journal	Rallies
	Posters & brochures	Newspaper	Internet	Radio	Television				
North America									
Canada	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-
Cuba	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Mexico	X	X	-	X	X	-	X	X	-
United States	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	X	-
South America									
Argentina	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Brazil	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chile	X	X	-	-	-	-	X	-	-
Colombia	X	X	-	X	X	-	X	X	-
Ecuador	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Australia									
Australia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-
Asia									
Bangladesh	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
China	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
India	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Indonesia	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Japan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Nepal	X	X	-	X	-	X	X	X	-
Pakistan	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Singapore	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
South Korea	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Taiwan, China	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Thailand	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Philippines	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vietnam	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Europe									
Austria	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-
Belgium	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-
Bulgaria	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Czech Republic	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Denmark	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
France	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Georgia	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Germany	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Greece	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ireland	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Italy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-
Poland	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Portugal	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-
Russia	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Slovak Republic	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Spain	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Turkey	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
United Kingdom	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Middle Eastern crescent									
Egypt	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Israel	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Lebanon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-
United Arab Emirates	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
Africa									
Botswana	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cameroon	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	-
South Africa	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

WHD 2007

In 2007, WHD was organized and successfully celebrated on six continents. Table 1 shows a list of 47 countries that have documented WHD and recounts the types of activities carried out in each country. Through public-private partnership, reports indicate that the hypertension awareness message has reached over 250 million people worldwide. Much of the success is due to mass media communication using the Internet, television and radio. In addition, there have been numerous press conferences and press releases in every country engaged in WHD. In addition to regular health promotion activities through the media and public rallies, some countries demonstrated innovative campaigns to increase public awareness of hypertension.

In Japan, blood pressure screening was performed in several locations, and was promoted using the slogan "Roll up your sleeves, Japan!". Japan also found a place in the Guinness World Record for most blood pressure screenings (2109 screenings) in 24 h at a single location on May 17, 2007. Japan promoted, in a very creative way, awareness of hypertension at the Chiba Marines baseball diamond with a theme of "Knock BP out of the park", hosting blood pressure screening stations and promoting messages through the 'jumbotron' during the game. From May 7 to 15, WHD teaser advertisements were placed in train stations throughout Nagoya.

In Australia, professor Judith Whitworth from the High Blood Pressure Research Council of Australia managed to get the federal minister of health, Mr Tony Abbott, to wear a 24 h ambulatory blood pressure monitor. The article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (18) states, "It revealed that the uber-fit minister averaged a very respectable 112/63, compared with the 120/70 average for a reasonably healthy person".

In the south African country Botswana, a population struggling with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, there is an increasing prevalence of hypertension. The burden of chronic diseases particularly is high but ignored by the public and the government due to limited resources and the need to contain HIV/AIDS. Professor Kiran Bhagat, a lonely but committed voice, is making huge efforts to bring public awareness to hypertension. He hosted WHD in the capital city of Gaborone, where he mobilized the interest and support of the World Health Organization, the national Ministry of Health, media and other stakeholders. Several hundred Botswanan citizens got their blood pressure checked in a screening camp on WHD (19).

In Italy, a new campaign aimed at educating the population about the necessity of powerful blood pressure control has been implemented by a partnership between Societa Italiana dell'Iperensione

Arteriosa (SIIA) (Italian Society of Hypertension) and the biggest cycling race, the Giro d'Italia, thereby leveraging on massive visibility, both at the regional and national level, from May 12 to June 3. With the SIIA campaign "Iperensione al Giro d'Italia", a stand for prevention and information was placed at the finish line of each daily stage involving a total of 18 cities. At the stand, two physicians tested the blood pressure and calculated the stroke risk of over 3000 people. The SIIA distributed information booklets while advising people to visit their doctors. The same booklet was distributed to 17,000 people standing along the race route by a SIIA-branded van.

In Canada, we had continued success in promoting awareness to the public, politicians (federal and provincial) and the media. In partnership with Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and industries, using the Internet as the medium, we reached almost 10 million viewers during WHD week (May 14 to 19). Active collaboration among all the stakeholders raised awareness about blood pressure, as well as about the use of dietary salt and the need to consume fresh fruits and vegetables.

WHD 2008

The theme for 2008, as noted earlier, is 'Measure your blood pressure...at home'. In an effort to empower the public, it is encouraged that people measure their blood pressure at home. Recent reports confirm the ease, accuracy and safety of blood pressure measurements using home monitors (20-25). It is also emphasized in the WHD information brochures that people should not resort to therapeutic management by themselves, and should consult a physician or a health care provider (26). The message is consistent with the Canadian Hypertension Education Program recommendations (27) on the home measurement of blood pressure.

CONCLUSIONS

WHD, initiated by the WHL, is making a serious impact in many countries around the world. More and more countries are joining the WHD every year to promote awareness, prevention and control of hypertension. As the momentum picks up year after year, the WHL is confident that we can reach almost all the estimated 1.5 billion people affected by elevated blood pressure. The success of WHD is due to the enthusiasm and voluntary action of multiple stakeholders from every member country. The WHL is looking forward to another activity-filled May 17 in 2008, when we aim to empower the public to measure their blood pressure at home.

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