

Impact of World Hypertension Day

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It is estimated that nearly one billion people are affected by hypertension worldwide, and this figure is predicted to increase to 1.5 billion by 2025. Nearly one-half of this population are unaware of their condition. Hypertension is the primary risk factor for heart disease and stroke. World Hypertension Day (WHD) has been an initiative of the World Hypertension League to raise hypertension awareness. In the past two years, many countries have taken an active part in promoting awareness through a number of initiatives in their respective countries. In Canada, WHD was a resounding success in 2005 and 2006, and major plans are underway for WHD 2007. The success of the Canadian WHD depends mainly on the partnership and shared values of all stakeholders, including professional societies, non-government organizations, government agencies and industry. Although it is too early to assess the impact of hypertension, it is evident that the countries involved are taking hypertension in the population seriously and are moving in the right direction. If the momentum continues, a drastic reduction in the prevalence of world-wide hypertension can be anticipated.

Key Words: *Activities; World Hypertension Day*

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is the primary and most common risk factor for heart disease, stroke and renal diseases. It is estimated that one in six people worldwide, or nearly one billion, are affected by high blood pressure, and it is estimated that this number will increase to 1.5 billion by 2025 (1). The World Health Organization also stated that high blood pressure is the most attributable cause of cardiovascular death (2). Unlike most diseases, high blood pressure has no symptoms and is therefore called the 'silent killer'. The only way to determine the presence of hypertension is by measuring one's blood pressure. High blood pressure is prevalent in every part of the world, in every region of any nation and in every community. It affects the rich and the poor, the young and the old, men and women, urban and rural populations, and the educated and illiterate alike.

Reports from many nations have shown that more than 50% of the affected population, in virtually every country, are not aware of their high blood pressure status (3-10). If a person is at least aware of his or her elevated blood pressure, some actions can be taken to lower blood pressure and prevent further consequences such as heart attack, stroke or kidney failure.

Incidence de la Journée mondiale de l'hypertension artérielle

On évalue presque à un milliard le nombre de personnes atteintes d'hypertension artérielle (HTA) dans le monde, et ce chiffre devrait monter à un milliard et demi d'ici à 2025. Presque la moitié de la population touchée ignore son état; pourtant, l'HTA est le principal facteur de risque de maladies cardiaques et d'accidents vasculaires cérébraux. La Journée mondiale de l'hypertension artérielle est une initiative de la Ligue mondiale contre l'hypertension afin de sensibiliser la population à la maladie. Au cours des deux dernières années, de nombreux pays ont participé à la campagne de sensibilisation par différentes activités. La Journée a connu un succès retentissant au Canada, en 2005 et en 2006, et un programme étoffé est en voie d'élaboration pour 2007. Le succès de cette Journée, au Canada, est tributaire de l'établissement de partenariats et de valeurs communes à toutes les parties intéressées, notamment aux sociétés professionnelles, aux organisations non gouvernementales, aux organismes gouvernementaux et à l'industrie. Bien qu'il soit encore trop tôt pour évaluer l'incidence de l'hypertension, il ne fait aucun doute que les pays participants prennent la maladie au sérieux au sein de la population et qu'ils font un pas dans la bonne direction. Si l'effort de sensibilisation continue sur sa lancée, on assistera à une très forte diminution de la prévalence de l'hypertension dans le monde.

Why World Hypertension Day?

In an attempt to improve the awareness of high blood pressure, the World Hypertension League (WHL) initiated World Hypertension Day (WHD). The WHL is an international, nonprofit organization with membership from 85 countries; it works through its member countries to promote hypertension awareness, early detection, and the prevention and control of this modern epidemic (11). The executive members and council of the WHL encouraged all its member countries (national hypertension societies) to promote awareness in their respective countries through programs of their choice to heighten the importance of early diagnosis, confirmation, treatment and control. The treatment may be nonpharmacological, pharmacological or both.

Hypertension affects more people in the world than HIV or AIDS, but people are not aware of their elevated blood pressure status. Why? Is it because it is not a life-threatening condition, or because it is perceived as something benign? Consequences of high blood pressure are far-reaching, leading to extensive end-organ damage. If hypertension were to receive the same level of public or political attention as HIV,

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TABLE 1
World Hypertension Day activities in various countries in 2005 (√) and 2006 (#)

Country	Posters and brochures	Media			Political promotion	Blood pressure screening	Scientific symposium	Rallies
		Newspaper	Radio	Television				
Argentina						#	#	
Australia		√	√	√				
Bangladesh	#	#	√#	√#		√#	√#	√#
Belgium		#	√#	√#	√	√#		
Botswana		√#	√#	√#	#	√#		
Bulgaria		√#		√#		√#	√#	
Canada	√#	√#	√#	√#	√#	√#	√#	
China							√	
Costa Rica		√		√			√	
Croatia	√		√	√		√	√	
Cuba		√	√	√	–	√	√	
Czech Republic		√	√	√	–	√	√	
Egypt	#					#	#	
France		√	√	√				
Georgia	#						#	
Germany	√	√				√		
India	√					√	√	
Iran	√#	√#	√	√#		√#	√#	
Italy	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Korea		#	#	#		#	#	
Lithuania		#		#		√#	√#	
Myanmar	√				√	√	√	
Nepal	#	#	#				#	
Nigeria	#		#	#		#	#	#
Pakistan	#	#	#	#		#	#	
Paraguay*	√				√	√	√	√
Peru*	√				√	√		√
Slovakia	√#			#		#	√	
Slovenia	√#	√#	√#	√#		√#	√	
Thailand	√#		#	#		√#	#	#
Turkey		#		#			#	
United States	√					√	√	

*Countries that provided reports in their official languages

AIDS or breast cancer, awareness of high blood pressure would increase significantly.

This is the very purpose of WHD. The aim is to heighten the awareness of hypertension in all spheres – among the public, families, professionals, policy makers and politicians.

WHD in 2005, 2006 and 2007

The WHL launched WHD in 2005; there was an overwhelming response by its member countries. While a large number of WHL member countries were actively involved in WHD, only a selected few prepared and submitted written reports to the WHL. Based on the completed, written reports that were submitted, a summary is provided in Table 1 of the activities undertaken in 2005 and 2006. Each country was creative in how WHD was deployed to raise awareness in their respective national contexts.

Canada hosted several activities across the country, including ones that raised awareness among politicians. The success of the Canadian WHD depends mainly on the partnership and shared values of all stakeholders, including professional societies, nongovernment organizations, government agencies and industry (12).

The WHL sets the WHD theme each year. In 2005, as the inaugural effort, the theme was simply 'Awareness of high blood pressure'. The 2006 theme was 'Treat to goal', with a focus to keep blood pressure under control. The recommended blood pressures are less than 140/90 mmHg for the general population and for the hypertensive population without any other complications, and less than 130/80 mmHg for those with diabetes mellitus or chronic kidney disease. These are the cut-off values recommended by international and Canadian guidelines (13,14). The 2007 WHD theme is 'Healthy diet, healthy blood pressure'. Through such specific themes, the WHL intends to raise awareness not only of hypertension, but also of factors contributing to an increase in the incidence of hypertension and on ways to prevent it.

Impact analysis

From the reports of various countries around the world, it is clear that people are becoming aware of the issue of hypertension. The WHL is very pleased with the response by its member societies at the country level and the dynamic engagement of the communities, as well as political activism in some countries.

Although it is too early to assess the impact of WHD, it is very clear that the member countries, especially the health ministries in most countries, are taking hypertension very seriously. The best outcome would be to see a drastic reduction in the prevalence of hypertension in all countries. With the continued involvement of national hypertension societies, we can anticipate a downward trend in the prevalence of hypertension to a lower level. We believe that WHD is paving the way toward a population-wide reduction in blood pressure. An impact analysis would be useful to conduct at least five years after the inception of the program.

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