

Nurses leading the fight against chronic disease

This is a report of a meeting held at the headquarters of the American Nurses Association on 24-25 June 2010.

Introduction

Nurses from across the world gathered in Washington DC to join and lead the fight against chronic disease. The event was organised by a partnership involving the International Council of Nurses (ICN), C3 Collaborating for Health, Pfizer Inc, the American Nurses Association (ANA) and the International Association of Patient Organizations (IAPO). The purpose of the meeting was to explore:



- 1) how nurses can be supported and mobilised/enabled to adopt and promote healthy lifestyles to reduce the risk of chronic disease for themselves, their families and communities;
- 2) the development of action plans to engage nurses in taking a lead role in the fight against chronic disease in their own countries;
- 3) scaling up through local partnerships.

Those attending the meeting included nurse leaders from Malta, Panama, Slovenia, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States, who participated alongside world experts in the field of chronic disease including representatives of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Atlanta, Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, the Center for Global Development and Tobacco Free Nurses.

Format

The meeting included presentations from experts on managing the three most common risk factors for chronic disease, namely the use of tobacco, lack of physical activity and poor diet; an exploration of the chronic disease challenge globally; and a particular emphasis on the reality of the challenge facing participant countries and their response to it.

Country representatives drafted action plans aimed at enhancing the contribution that they and their national nurses association (NNAs) could make in preventing chronic disease. These plans and the appropriate levels of support, monitoring and evaluation required will be further discussed and refined by the NNAs. It is anticipated that feedback, evaluation and further roll out will take place during the ICN biennial conference in Malta in May 2011.

Of particular benefit was the enthusiastic ongoing involvement and contribution of presenters across the two days. Participants, both country representatives and presenters, took the opportunity to complete individual health risk assessments and to develop personal action plans to limit their risk and improve their own health and well-being. The meeting included activity breaks, and healthy food and refreshments were provided.



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Expert presentations

The expert presentations are available on the C3 website: <http://www.c3health.org/c3activities/health-professionals/global-nursing-project/washington-meeting-2010/expert-presentations/>

Karen Daley, President, American Nurses Association

The newly elected President of the ANA emphasised the severity of the chronic disease challenge facing the world, including the dangers of environmental exposure. In order to respond appropriately, nursing curricula need to focus on competencies to equip nurses to intervene early and support and encourage lifestyle change and behaviour modification. The changes to the health-care system in the United States provide a timely opportunity for a paradigm shift towards health promotion and prevention of disease.

Christine Hancock, Director, C3 Collaborating for Health

Christine set the scene on the changing patterns of disease globally and the challenge of chronic disease across the developed and developing world, emphasising that it is the poor who bear the brunt of the epidemic. She highlighted the importance of lifestyle and environmental factors in the prevention of chronic disease and focused attention particularly on the risk factors of tobacco, physical inactivity and poor diet. Her presentation concluded by adapting a quote from Haefden Mahler, WHO Director General (1985). She proposed that: 'If the millions of nurses in a thousand different places articulate the same ideas and convictions about preventing chronic disease and come together as one force, they could act as a powerhouse for change.'



Tesfa Ghebrehwet, ICN Consultant in Nursing and Health Policy

Tesfa's presentation focused on the importance of 'upstream' thinking by nurses to promote health and prevent chronic disease. He emphasised the fact that many non-communicable diseases have shared risk factors and are preventable. With the appropriate knowledge and skills nurses are well positioned to take a lead role in the fight against chronic disease at all levels from influencing their families and communities, to intervening with patients and influencing policy.

Linda Sarna and Stella Bialous, Tobacco Free Nurses

Linda and Stella focused on the need to reframe and position the risk factors into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – for example, linking smoking cessation to MDGs 4 and 5 on Maternal and Child Health. They discussed some of the barriers and challenges facing nurses in promoting and supporting smoking cessation, including lack of knowledge and skills. They raised particular concerns about the fact that the messages are not reaching young girls and suggested that young people may respond better to 'green' messages about smoking than to health messages.

Fleetwood Loustalot, Centers for Disease Control, Atlanta

Fleetwood, himself a nurse, provided up-to-date information and evidence about the importance of diet and physical activity in the prevention of chronic disease, and highlighted the link between physical activity and mental health. He emphasised the importance of providing clear, consistent messages and the importance of disaggregating data to local level. He proposed that CDC guidelines provide an evidence-based reference point, can be used to assign roles, responsibility and accountability and need to be used to inform local action and policy. He also acknowledged that the risk factors of diet and physical activity are trailing behind tobacco in terms of policy at national and international level.

Martha Hill, Dean and Professor of Nursing, Medicine and Public Health, Johns Hopkins University

Martha focused on the why, what, when and how of evaluation and stressed the importance of building evaluation into the design of the programme or initiative and the need for clarity about what you are trying

to achieve or change. She highlighted the different phases and stages of evaluation and emphasised the value of intervening early to address problems. She suggested that the use of a logic model aids the process of thinking and clarification. She encouraged participants to use practical and feasible approaches to evaluation balancing the need for detail against the danger of being overwhelmed by too much information.

Rachel Nugent, Deputy Director Global Health, Center for Global Development

Rachel provided a global perspective on the cost-effectiveness of interventions; the impact of NCD on developing countries; and the contribution that donors are making to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in developing countries. She suggested that many countries are moving from awareness-building to implementation, informed by WHO strategy. She also highlighted the challenge of securing funding, as many funders are cutting back; there is increased diversification of funding streams with increased numbers of private-sector donors; and, despite rhetoric to the contrary, 'disease silos' remain strong and active. None of the cross-cutting approaches tend to include NCDs, although more evidence is required. There are many opportunities to link chronic disease with some of the MDGs, especially related to maternal and child health. From a budget of \$21.7bn, 2.7% is the overall share for NCDs. It is important to focus attention on the forthcoming UN High Level Meeting on NCDs scheduled for September 2011 and to clarify what is being asked by whom, and how nurses might best engage and contribute.

Myrl Weinberg, IAPO (Immediate Past Chair) and President of the Health Council

Myrl informed the group about the role, mission and ways of working of the International Association of Patient Organisations and its expanding interest and involvement in promotion of healthy lifestyles and prevention of ill-health, working especially with groups and organisations where the risk factors are shared. She stressed the importance of partnership working, with patients and carers being treated as equal partners and patient involvement being institutionalised into service development and delivery.

Paula DeCola, Senior Director, External Medical Affairs, Pfizer Inc.

Paula highlighted the importance to organisations of having a healthy workforce, and presented the Pfizer approach to supporting its workforce to adopt health-promoting behaviours in their day-to-day working environments. Initiatives include health-incentives programmes, healthy eating and exercise, health and wellness services and disease management, as well as social networking and communication. She also noted that, while the programming Pfizer has engaged in is extensive, there is the opportunity for NNAs to consider if elements of the program in an adapted way could be an offering for NNA's constituents.

Country-specific presentations

The country-specific presentations are available on the C3 website:

<http://www.c3health.org/c3activities/health-professionals/global-nursing-project/washington-meeting-2010/country-specific-presentations/>

Participants from each country provided an overview of national priorities and policies, as well as current NNA initiatives. Presentations from the individual countries can be accessed through the links below. Following reminders about some of the key principles of action planning by Pat Hughes (click here), participants began the process of drafting action plans to enhance the contribution of nurses in combating chronic disease.

Malta

A new government strategy, including many targets, for fighting chronic disease was launched in April 2010 in Malta. With the island's dependence on tourism, Malta faces a particular challenge in ensuring that public policies and laws underpinning healthy environments and supporting healthy lifestyles, for example in terms of smoking and drinking, do not conflict with holidaymakers' expectations. This meeting provides a tremendous stimulus to enable and encourage nurses to participate in the implementation of the strategy as currently few nurses work in the area of health promotion and disease prevention. Building the capacity of nurses through education and training is key. The opportunities for nurses to work in partnership with

the government are further strengthened by the fact that ICN's biennial conference will be taking place in Malta in May 2011.

Panama

Nurses are involved in some health-promoting activities, including smoking cessation and nutrition-awareness campaigns. The NNA plans to implement a wide-ranging information and education strategy to develop the knowledge and skills of nurses to enable them to take a stronger role in fighting chronic disease. They also plan to develop stronger partnerships with communities and patient organisations and to conduct community health assessments.

Slovenia

It is recognised that there is an increasing role for nurses in prevention and treatment in Slovenia. However, nurses need additional education and training in health promotion and disease prevention, and the NNA will need support to enable them to access appropriate materials and resources. The NNA will work closely with the ICN Board Member and will also seek to work in partnership with other professional groups.

[Click for Slovenia presentation](#)

South Africa

The government in South Africa has recently launched a new 10-point plan, and there is still a strong focus on communicable disease especially HIV/AIDS and TB and on delivery of the MDGs. It is important therefore to identify ways of addressing chronic disease through existing mechanisms and funding streams, and strengthening policy implementation and service delivery. The NNA plans to raise awareness among its members at a series of forthcoming events. They will also seek to work in partnership with relevant personnel in the Ministry of Health, as well as with other professional societies and NGOs.

United Kingdom

There are a plethora of government and other publications including some recently that have focused on workplace health and well-being. A new policy direction is to be announced shortly by the recently elected coalition government. It is likely that there will be an increased focus on moving implementation responsibility into local communities. The NNA will continue to work closely with government and to mobilise activists and specialist nurses among their 400,000 members to play a stronger role in combating chronic disease. As an employer of approximately 800 staff, it is proposed to discuss with the Royal College of Nursing's Directors of Nursing and Human Resources a variety of initiatives aimed at engaging staff in improving their own health, with a particular focus on increasing physical activity, perhaps using departmental teams and fun competitions and promoting the use of the stairs within the headquarters building.

United States

The focus on implementation of health-system reform provides an avenue for nurses to become more strongly engaged in the fight against chronic disease as part of the drive to improve access to co-ordinated, integrated care. Currently at policy level, obesity is more of a target than alcohol or tobacco. ANA has been significantly involved in addressing environmental issues related to toxins and chemicals. They will work to increase awareness of the chronic disease challenge during forthcoming events and may include health risk assessments for participants. They will also focus on helping nurses develop their intervention skills.

Next steps

Country representatives agreed to refine and develop their action plans. Monitoring and support will be provided and it is anticipated that feedback, evaluation and further roll-out will take place during the ICN biennial conference in Malta in May 2011.

The organising partners will continue to work together to address issues emerging from the meeting and to shape and drive forward this movement to engage nurses in the fight against chronic disease.