St. Mildred’s Lightbourn School

Novaira Salman

World Health Organization

Singapore

Non-communicable diseases (NCD) will become the leading cause of death worldwide and is an increasing problem that must be dealt with on a global level. Through vaccinations and improved sanitation, the previous primary cause of death being communicable diseases -- infections -- have reduced significantly in countries around the world. While on the other hand non-communicable diseases, which include, diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, are all illnesses that require systematic follow-ups in adequate facilities and expensive medications.

In Singapore, this does not pose a major problem for citizens as the Ministry of Health believes in ensuring quality and affordable basic medical services for all, through the implementation of universal health coverage. It does though, present a problem by being the leading cause of death for Singaporeans. Male or female, cancer has become the biggest threat to citizens. In addition to this, there is no apparent cure or vaccination for NCDs, only lifestyle changes, in turn creating a difficult situation regarding prevention and control. What has to be looked upon and discussed is how NCDS can be prevented and controlled not just in Singapore, but in low and middle-income countries where medical facilities are not able to accommodate long-term patient care and receive limited funding.  Singapore believes that due to restrained funds, many low and middle-income countries cannot reach their health care facility potential. As well as this, many citizens in these countries do not earn sufficient wages to pay for health services. Furthermore, due to the lack of funding, low and middle income countries do not have the budgets to create free, public initiatives for preventing non-communicable diseases.

Non-communicable diseases are defined as diseases that cannot be spread from person to person. This means that those who fall victim to them most likely have a history of an NCD in their family or have made poor lifestyle choices. Alcohol abuse, tobacco use, unfit diets and/or lack of physical activity all contribute to the development of these diseases. Singapore’s Ministry of Health promotes healthy living and preventive health programs as well as maintains high standards of living and sanitation. This becomes evident through free physical activities around the main downtown area, including ‘sunrise in the city’ a studio gym with free morning workout programs, ‘i-Run’ weekly running sessions for all skill levels and ‘Mall Aerobics’ a free hour long cardio workout for all. Moreover, the Health Promotion Board hosts many challenges created to initiate better life choices for Singaporeans, examples being, a 28-day smoke-free challenge, weight loss challenges and healthy eating challenges.

Due to high prices, many people are unable to afford medications. The World Health Organization proposed to create a universal access to medication plan as well as a development of global pharmaceuticals. The reason why many are forced to pay high prices for these medications is partially because of a dishonest doctor and/or pharmacists. In the pharmaceutical market, it differs very much from other markets as nothing can be purchased without the confirmation of a doctor. They can recommend a cheaper, over the counter version of an unhealthy prescription or prescribe an expensive medication which has unnecessary amounts of harmful compounds targeting your kidneys in some instances. In addition to this problem, pharmaceuticals provide no economic assets that come with reselling. This is due to laws declaring resale of medications illegal.

There hasn’t been too much done in Singapore about this particular situation due to the fact that Singaporeans have universal health coverage covering the cost of medications at most levels. But this is a major problem in countries that have citizens earning a low pay. Not only will they have to pay for hefty health procedure bills they would have to keep up with medication bills. So it was addressed by aiding the situation. Singapore’s National Medical Research Center gave out research grants totaling to $269 million. To help this situation, even more, Singapore has pharmaceuticals as their top ten exports bringing in about $6-8 billion.

Solutions for access to medication are limited but a few can be done. If a nation were to create a recycling station for extra prescription medication with a fix few cents per pill, medication could turn into an economic asset to buyers as well as keep unwanted drugs away from homes. A way Singapore combated skyrocketing prices in hospitals could be used to help prevent prices of medications that stray too far from the international reference price. This forced hospitals to make procedure bills public, allowing the citizens to choose which procedure would be the cheapest. Not only did it create competition in favour of the consumer, it allowed other hospitals to become more aware of their competitors and really give the right price. For pharmaceuticals, doctors would be asked to publish the medications they had recommended or prescribed showing patients whether a doctor is just fishing for money by giving their patients expensive prescriptions only. This will create competition between doctors as well as make them aware as to how they can serve their patient better.

Singapore has become a country with much equality between the genders but that does not mean it does not happen elsewhere. Men have significantly higher mortality rates than women, it has been explained by many biological and practical reasons. The biological reason is that hypothetically men have been victims of sexual selection. This shows traditional masculinity characteristics in males where power and tough are thought to be above all. Practical reasons are that men have greater weights, heights and lower resistance to infection than women making them more susceptible of having parasites. In addition to this, men, due to stereotypical gender roles see psychiatric help as feminised or unwelcoming so they tend to seek mental help less often. The problem is that men suffer many more mental illnesses than women. For Women, many of the problems lie around childbearing, violence and male dominance.

Male health inequities such as increased rates of suicide is very alarming. Framework that could be laid down might be starting from young ages, in school curriculums, young boys are taught that seeking mental help is not feminised or unwelcoming but as much needed as going to the regular doctors. For women, especially those who live more in rural areas where male dominance predominantly sits, to teach her that seeking help from non-profit women charities and organizations is not wrong and that wellbeing is higher than society shame. The United Nations millennium development goals (MDG) strives to target social inequalities and promote gender equality as well as empower women. A very interesting goal for MDG is the third, stating that it wants to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education. Education is the key to changing gender roles. The UN should take that to their advantage and create a future generation that does not have to face discrimination, racism, gender inequalities and other society linked negative thoughts.