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EDITORIAL

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES AND THE NEED OF THE HOUR

A century earlier very few people used to die of heart diseases. With the passage of time, heart diseases have become the number one global killer. The age of technology has made life easier and made people more prone to heart diseases. The combination of a sedentary lifestyle and a rich diet has led to an increase in clogged blood vessels, heart attacks, and strokes.

These diseases are a global health problem with no geographic, gender, or socio-economic boundaries. Despite the tremendous advances in cardiac care made recently, including drugs, devices, diagnostic innovation and cardiac surgical methods; many patients continue to die from heart diseases or live with significant morbidity.

The need of the hour is not only to provide improvements in existing heart remedies and surgical methods but also to extend preventive strategies such as improved life style, nutritious and healthy food, corporate health protection initiatives and institution of health wellness programmes to combat heart diseases. Healthy lifestyle including heart friendly nutrition, exercises, tobacco abstinence, weight management, hypertension, Diabetes care and stress management will enhance health in the community. In the last couple of decades the disease burden across the world has shifted from communicable diseases to non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Moreover, a majority of people suffering from NCDs reside in the developing countries. These nations, not having completely dealt with the scourge of communicable diseases yet, are now facing the additional burden of NCDs. The already inadequate and stretched healthcare systems in these countries has meant that the mortality from NCDs is also higher, with more than 80% of premature deaths occurring in low and middle-income groups. Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) were once thought to be impacting the rich and affluent, but it is now well established that they afflict the poor as well. While changing lifestyles, unhealthy eating habits and declining physical activity are the key reasons for high incidence rates in the rich population, the issues of access and affordability account for higher mortality amongst the urban poor and rural population. These diseases impact not only the well being, but can also hold back the economic growth of the country due to increased healthcare expenditure and diminished productivity.

To address the issue of rising CVDs, urban Pakistan has made considerable progress in delivering high quality diagnostics, interventional cardiac care and advanced cardiac surgery. Our hospitals perform heart surgeries with outcomes that are comparable to the best in the world. However, this level of care is available only to the select few - those that can access and afford it. Though our hospitals conduct thousands of heart surgeries a year, this is only a small fraction of what is required.

The solution to this problem does not lie with the healthcare providers alone. There is an urgent need for the Government, urban planners, educational institutions, employers, food and beverage industry, and wellness and fitness players to take up the challenge and work towards behaviour and life style changes through positive thinking and reinforcements.

Heart diseases are no longer a cause of concern for only the rich. If anything, the poor are impacted more by it, and the control of the disease in the poor population should be a high priority.

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