



STRONGER FOCUS ON NUTRITION WITHIN HEALTH SERVICES COULD SAVE 3.7 MILLION LIVES BY 2025

4 September 2019 - Health services must integrate a stronger focus on ensuring optimum nutrition at each stage of a person's life, according to a new report released by the World Health Organization (WHO). It is estimated that the right investment in nutrition could save 3.7 million lives by 2025[1].

“In order to provide quality health services and achieve Universal Health Coverage, nutrition should be positioned as one of the cornerstones of essential health packages,” said Dr Naoko Yamamoto, Assistant Director-General at WHO. “We also need better food environments which allow all people to consume healthy diets.”

Essential health packages in all settings need to contain robust nutrition components but countries will need to decide which interventions best support their national health policies, strategies and plans.

Key interventions include: providing iron and folic acid supplements as part of antenatal care; delaying umbilical cord clamping to ensure babies receive important nutrients they need after birth; promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding; providing advice on diet such as limiting the intake of free sugars[2] in adults and children and limiting salt intake to reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Investment in nutrition actions will help countries get closer to their goal of achieving universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals. It can also help the economy, with every US\$1 spent by donors on basic nutrition programmes returning US\$ 16 to the local economy[3].

The world has made progress in nutrition but major challenges still exist. There has been a global decline in stunting (low height-for-age ratio): between 1990 and 2018, the prevalence of stunting in children aged under 5 years declined from 39.2% to 21.9%, or from 252.5 million to 149.0 million children, though progress has been much slower in Africa and South-East Asia.

Obesity, however, is on the rise. The prevalence of children considered overweight rose from 4.8% to 5.9% between 1990 and 2018, an increase of over 9 million children. Adult overweight and obesity are also rising in nearly every region and country, with 1.9 billion people overweight in 2016, of which 650 million (13% of the world's population) are obese.

Obesity is a major risk factor for diabetes; cardiovascular diseases (mainly heart disease and stroke); musculoskeletal disorders (especially osteoarthritis – a highly disabling degenerative disease of the joints); and some cancers (including endometrial, breast, ovarian, prostate, liver, gallbladder, kidney, and colon). An increased focus on nutrition by the health services is key to addressing both aspects of the “double-burden” of malnutrition. The Essential Nutrition Actions publication is a compilation of nutrition actions to address this “double burden” of underweight and overweight and provide a tool for countries to integrate nutrition interventions into their national health and development policies.

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WHO CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION TO REDUCE PATIENT HARM IN HEALTHCARE

13 September 2019 - Millions of patients are harmed each year due to unsafe health care worldwide resulting in 2.6 million deaths annually in low-and middle-income countries alone. Most of these deaths are avoidable. The personal, social and economic impact of patient harm leads to losses of trillions of US dollars worldwide. The World Health Organization is focusing global attention on the issue of patient safety and launching a campaign in solidarity with patients on the very first World Patient Safety Day on 17 September.

“No one should be harmed while receiving health care. And yet globally, at least 5 patients die every minute because of unsafe care,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “We need a patient safety culture that promotes partnership with patients, encourages reporting and learning from errors, and creates a blame-free environment where health workers are empowered and trained to reduce errors.”

Four out of every ten patients are harmed during primary and ambulatory health care. The most detrimental errors are related to diagnosis, prescription and the use of medicines. Medication errors alone cost an estimated US\$ 42 billion annually. Unsafe surgical care procedures cause complications in up to 25% of patients resulting in 1 million deaths during or immediately after surgery annually.

Patient harm in health care is unacceptable. WHO is calling for urgent action by countries and partners around the world to reduce patient harm in health care. Patient safety and quality of care are essential for delivering effective health services and achieving universal health coverage.

Investment in improving patient safety can lead to significant financial savings. The cost of prevention is much lower than the cost of treatment due to harm. As an example, in the United States alone, focused safety improvements led to an estimated US\$28 billion in savings in Medicare hospitals between 2010 and 2015.

Greater patient involvement is the key to safer care. Engaging patients can reduce the burden of harm by up to 15%, saving billions of dollars each year.