

‘Preventive cardiology plan needed as deaths rise by 61pc in two years’

Preventive cardiology units should be established at every cardiac facility and tertiary-care hospital in Pakistan to educate people about lifestyle modification and early detection as international health organisations have observed an alarming 61 per cent increase in deaths due to cardiovascular diseases in Pakistan.

“The World Health Organisation’s data says an alarming 61 per cent increase in cardiovascular deaths in Pakistan between 2014 and 2016. As per WHO statistics, over 1,100 persons are dying every day due to heart attacks and other cardiovascular diseases in Pakistan,” eminent interventional cardiologist Dr Khawar Kazmi said while speaking on Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) Prevention at a seminar on Thursday.

The seminar on ‘Preventing Heart Diseases with Scarcity of Resources’ had been organised by the Cardiology Department of the Liaquat National Hospital (LNH) and it was addressed by top cardiologists from the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD), Liaquat National Hospital, Tabba Heart Institute and a visiting cardiologist from Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Top-of-the-line cardiologists of Pakistan observed that two most significant risk factors for causing cardiovascular disease (CVD) in the world, including Pakistan, are smoking and an abnormal ratio of blood lipids that account for two-thirds of the global risk of heart attack. The additional risk factors include high blood pressure, diabetes, abdominal obesity, stress, inadequate consumption of fruits and vegetables, and lack of daily exercise.

Prof Khawar Kazmi, who has recently joined the NICVD as head of preventive cardiology, claimed that sedentary lifestyle among Pakistanis as well as their poor dietary habits, lack of awareness combined with other known risk factors were to blame for the sharp increase in cardiovascular disease. He deplored that there was almost no focus on preventing cardiovascular diseases in the country.

“There is no lack of resources with the government and billions are being spent on providing state of the art treatment of cardiac ailments, but a little amount is being spent on the prevention of cardiovascular disease, resulting in an increasing number of deaths despite all the efforts.”

Dr Kazmi added that in a country where the majority of patients could not even afford to have medicines for a month after heart attack, preventive cardiology programmes must be launched without any delay.

He maintained that preventive cardiology units should be established at each and every hospital in the country while preventive cardiology awareness should be started at school level, saying that awareness about risk factors leading to cardiovascular disease and early detection were the key to prevention.

“Average age is 67 years in Pakistan but thousands of young men are dying at very young age of 40-45 due to heart attacks. Just think about these men who have school-going children and wives who are not working women. We need to educate people as such tragedies are happening every hour around us.”

Medical Director LNH and renowned health management expert Dr Salman Faridi called for establishing primary healthcare centers throughout the country with more focus and spending on primary healthcare, saying that due to commercial interest, focus in Pakistan was on establishing tertiary healthcare facilities, which was not the solution to our health problems.

Deploing that only 483 million rupees were the annual budget of the 304 rural health centers (RHCs) and basic health units (BHUs) in Sindh, with much of the money being spent on salaries and logistics, he said

that probably only 120 million rupees were spent on primary healthcare in the province, which was nothing. He added that the healthcare situation could only be improved by paying more attention to primary healthcare and family medicine.

Dr Faisal Ahmed, head of the cardiology department at the LNH, said that due to sedentary lifestyle and bad dietary habits, the risk of cardiovascular disease started developing among our kids at very early age. Citing Dutch cardiologist Prof Peter Lansberg, he said the autopsy of a child who had died in a road accident revealed that he had started developing cardiovascular disease at the age of eight years.

Other cardiologists, including Dr Fawad Farooq from the NICVD, Dr Imran Khan from the LNH and Prof Bashir Hanif from Tabba Heart Institute, stressed the need for quitting smoking, adopting a healthy lifestyle with daily exercise, having a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables to prevent having cardiovascular diseases.

They said hypertension and diabetes were two leading risk factors that cause cardiovascular diseases, but they added that they were also preventable with lifestyle modification, resorting to exercise and adopting healthy lifestyle practices.

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