



EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD

MANAGEMENT AND TREATMENT OF NCDs: TANZANIA

The rise of NCDs (Non-Communicable Diseases) is a new phenomenon with a growing impact in Africa, as well as the number of patients and premature deaths. In Tanzania, CUAMM manages health centers that treat patients with chronic diseases, acting both on clinical and structural aspects and improving the population's awareness of NCDs.

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NCDs IN AFRICA

It is now well known that chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are an urgent global health issue. What may be less known is the role that NCDs have as causes of illness and death in African countries. In 2000 in Africa, people mainly contracted and died of infectious diseases, but in 2023 they get sick and die less often of infectious diseases get more often sick with NCDs, and die prematurely from them. The data show that three-quarters of global deaths from NCDs are in Low-and Low-Middle Income Countries (L-LMICs) and, more importantly, 86% of premature deaths from NCDs are in L-LMICs¹.

THE CASE OF TANZANIA

CUAMM began working with NCDs in Tanzania in 2016 and opened a dedicated clinic in the Outpatients Department of Tosamaganga Hospital. Since 2019 the project has extended to the network of health centers in the district. In the clinic and the nine health centers, patients are treated for hypertension and diabetes, two extremely common diseases in Tanzania. Thirty-three point two percent of the adult population is hypertensive (WHO)², while the prevalence of diabetes has increased from 2.8% in 2011 to 12.3% in 2021, the highest in Africa (International Diabetes Federation, 2021).

In most cases, however, there is a lack of awareness and knowledge of the diseases; and there is a lack of services and economic and access barriers that make it more difficult to manage the diseases. According to the data (The Tanzania NCDI Poverty Commission, 2020), 3% of hypertensive people realize they are hypertensive and are undergoing treatment and effectively managing it; for diabetes, the figure is 6%. The majority of the popu-

lation does not know that they are sick, or if they do know it, are not undergoing treatment or, if they are being treated, it is not effective.

Since 2019, more than 2000 patients have been registered at the Tosamaganga Hospital clinic: about 60% of them are in treatment for six months. From the data, it emerged that the main barrier that prevents patients from continuing to follow up on their care is the distance between their home and the hospital, due to the unsustainable cost of travel. This is why, starting June 2023, CUAMM doctors involved in the project travel to each of the health centers once a month to reach patients and not interrupt their treatment.

At the same time, a network of peer supporters was created to address the issue of low awareness of these problems in the community. These are patients who help their peers and bolster awareness and understanding of the issue.

A NEW PROBLEM

The NCDs issue is still new in Africa. There are many aspects on which work is needed, including increasing awareness in the community and better access to medicines, ensuring their supply, and lowering economic barriers.

In terms of awareness, prevention, and management of NCDs, there is a noteworthy new aspect related to changes in lifestyles. Specifically, 29% of patients treated in CUAMM health centers are overweight and 26% are obese. This is related to the excessive consumption of sugary drinks sold at lower prices than water in every remote village in Tanzania, without any limitation by the government.

This is another factor to be considered in managing NCDs and requires an integrated approach to build a suitable treatment scenario for these "new" diseases.

NOTES

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/noncommunicable-diseases>

² <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/prevalence-of-hypertension-among-adults-aged-30-79-years>