

The burden of chronic disease and the need for evidence

This presentation will briefly review the increasing and serious burden that chronic disease presents in the global picture. Most remarkable is the increase in this burden in developing countries. Nonetheless in the more economically developed countries the chronic disease and health promotion infrastructure to address the challenges of the health care and prevention costs is generally poorly developed. Even the most developed countries often lack the depth of capacity to deal with the impact and burden of chronic diseases. Population demographics argue that the situation will get worse in the coming years. Nonetheless there seems to be little sense of urgency. The monitoring of risk factors for chronic disease is critical to both an understanding of the changing burden and to the development of a public health infrastructure to provide an evidence base for the analysis of efforts to assess interventions to change the risk factors. In addition there is a key role for surveillance to raise a “sense of urgency.” The challenge for surveillance in this area is how to incorporate the “causes of the causes” of chronic disease, the so-called social-cultural determinants area. This area takes more traditional risk factor surveillance approaches to another dimension of complexity and presents exciting and difficult aspects for those in surveillance. The importance of keeping this in focus will be discussed.

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