Organisation of Primary Care Services for Patients Suffering from Common Chronic Conditions

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Abstract

Because of the high and escalating prevalence of debilitating and distressing chronic communicable and non-communicable diseases in all population groups, it is essential to deploy efficient, effective and affordable preventive and control measures in the community, at the work-place, and at all levels of medical service. The role of primary care as a gate-keeper for specialised medical care and as an entry portal to public action is pivotal. It is the focus of this presentation.

The common-sense organisational criteria of WHO's ICCC (Innovative Care for Chronic Conditions) complement an infra-structure like the one I developed and implemented at three clinics years ago. The structure included informed patient and family participation; a patient-centred focus; a one-stop internally-consistent service; an in-service trained, empathetic and motivated team of entry-level clinical clerks, a health educator and part-time clinicians; evidence-based, cost-effective, feasible, and regularly up-dated clinical and administrative protocols; procedures for ensuring patient and provider compliance; regular, sustained follow-up of patients including defaulter tracing; good patient and facility record-keeping; and programme monitoring and evaluation. The WHO also stressed co-ordination and continuity of care across health care settings, categories of conditions, communities and time, and disease surveillance.

The successful implementation of a chronic disease management strategy is predicated on a patient education programme. This empowers patients, facilitates participation and promotes loyalty. Patients should know about the determinants, risk factors, features and management modalities of the disease/s from which they suffer. They should also know how to access services, why and how to implement non-drug measures, how to use prescribed drugs, and how to manage common acute conditions.

The service should be area-based so that the facility can participate as a respected partner in local programmes on issues relevant to chronic disease, prevention and control including access to healthy food, recreational services and public transport.