

A Non-drug Programme for the Prevention and Management of Common Chronic Medical Conditions

Poster presentation at the 13th National Rural Health Conference
Rural Doctors Association of Southern Africa (Rudasa). August 2009

Abstract

Diseases have specific aetiologies, risk factors and treatments. Nevertheless all exhibit commonalities. Some relevant to chronic diseases are considered. It is necessary to look at the inter-related chain of causality. People live in historical, social, economic, and geographic contexts which determine the pattern of health and disease by influencing what is eaten, and how people live and work.

The current context is consumerism with social and market forces overwhelming individual choice. This perspective should be shared with patients so that they can buy-in to recommendations that derive from it. A beetroot, garlic, virgin olive oil and African potato, or other free-floating non-contextualised mantra has no resonance. Victim-bashing is counter-productive.

Today people eat commercially-prepared and industrially-produced high fat, sugar-sweetened, salt-saturated, fibre-deficient food, smoke, sniff, and chew tobacco, abuse alcohol, cocaine, and other recreational drugs and “sleep around” for fun. They are dependent on motor vehicles, escalators and “lifts” for commuting, and click a “mouse” or a remote button for exercise, Sexual intercourse is a debased, exploited commodity and rape is used as a means of control. These are the risk factors that should be stopped or at least reduced.

Despite the validity of a WHO-FAO statement that for “interventions to have a lasting effect on the risk factor prevalence and health of societies, it is ... essential to change or modify the environment in which these diseases develop¹,” action at the personal level can make a difference.

The degree of reversion to an approximate disease-free normality or to a less diseased state depends on the age of the person, the stage of the disease and the timing and extent of the interventions. Many diseases can be prevented.

Recommendations on diet, exercise, alcohol abuse, tobacco use, sleep, and rest and on stress management will be outlined.

¹ Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases. WHO Technical report Series 916. 2003. World Health Organization. Geneva.