

ENDA- Creating awareness through education



Dr. Goitom Mebrahtu

By Semhar Mebrahtu

Diabetes has become one of the rapidly increasing non-communicable diseases that threatens public health all over the world. Eritrea is no exception. The 2010 nation-wide community based survey shows 4.7% prevalence of diabetes in Eritrea. According to Diabetes Atlas magazine, 5th edition, death attributed to diabetes reached over 1,280 in 2012.

Generally, in Eritrea, diabetes is treated at general outpatient clinics or hospitals. The increase in the number of patients has led to the opening of specialized diabetes clinics at Halibet Specialized and Hazhaz hospitals. Several hospitals in the other regions of the country have also started diabetes care clinics as general outpatient service. The Eritrean National Diabetes Association (ENDA) has been striving to do its share in diabetes prevention, care and treatment.

The chairman of ENDA, Dr. Goitom Mebrahtu, said that the association was founded by few interested diabetic individuals on November 28, 1996 as a result of the growing number of people with diabetes in the country. It is established by people with diabetes and their care-takers. He also said that the association is affiliated with the International Diabetes Federation (IDF).

The association is a legally registered charitable, non-profit organization which strives to improve the lives of diabetic people. Since its foundation,

ENDA has remained the vanguard of efforts to advocate for all people affected by diabetes, regardless of their socio-economic background. Currently, the number of members at the association has reached over 13,000, with branches in six regions and more than 15 districts of the country. The association is administered by a general assembly which consists of representatives from the regional branches. The ENDA's National Executive Committee office members are elected every three years according to the association's by laws.

Dr. Goitom said that the association's daily activities are managed by a volunteer team of duly elected National Executive Committee officials and two recruited permanent secretaries. The association also works closely with the Ministry of Health (MoH), major local pharmaceutical companies as well as corporate sponsors who are aware of the devastating effects of diabetes and other non-communicable diseases; and have made diabetes education and prevention a major part of their corporate social responsibility programs.

The Chairman underscored that the ENDA's mission is to improve the health of all citizens especially those who live with diabetes, by providing a high standard of diabetes education and care, implementing prevention and advocacy while embracing strategic partnership and research, in order to build "A Diabetes-Free Eritrea!"

Furthermore, ENDA's objectives are to empower diabetic patients, their families and the whole public by supplying up-to-date information on diabetes prevention, care and the right kind of treatments. It also strives to see positive changes in the lives of the patients.

The association supports the activities of the Diabetic Center in the premises of Halibet National Referral Hospital. In Eritrea, diabetics are privileged to get free oral anti-diabetic medicine and insulin, free medical checkup and associated co-morbidity treatment in all health facilities. The MoH always secures adequate amount of medicine to all diabetic patients because once a diabetic starts taking medicine the patient has to regularly monitor it for a life time. Therefore, securing medicine is one of the key endeavors of the government. The head office also distributes medical supplies such as blood glucose monitoring meters and strips to children who cannot afford them.

Creating awareness through education is one of the major activities of the association. Though diabetes is an enduring disease, it could be monitored with the right kind of information and necessary lifestyle changes. For the reason, the association organizes an educational gathering on daily basis at the outpatient clinics of the major hospitals by collaborating with the MoH. This program has been underway for the last 17 years and attendance of patients has been rising from time to time. The other method of information dissemination is annual publication of magazines.

Furthermore, many members go to major hospitals to take a blood glucose test freely since few patients afford to make self-blood test regularly. All health facilities offer blood glucose test service for free.

The United Nations has passed a resolution on diabetes following the initiatives taken by the International Diabetes Federation. "November 14" is annually celebrated as the United Nations Diabetes Day. The Eritrean Diabetes Association also celebrates this day colorfully with its sponsors and supporters. Many sponsors and pharmaceutical companies use this opportunity to introduce their products and express allegiance to the association.

Dr. Goitom said that the main focus of ENDA is advocating the prevention and control of diabetes and increasing the knowledge and skills of controlling diabetes among diabetes patients and care takers. Along with this, increasing awareness of the public and particularly diabetes patients helps prevent and control diabetes and its complications. Dr. Goitom added that the other focus of the association is to lobby on behalf of children and adolescents, government and non-government organizations for anti-diabetic drugs and related consumables. Moreover, it advocates for the rights and the fulfillment of diabetic patients need for care and social, psychological and moral support.

Dr. Goitom said that the association also has a responsibility to provide technical and counseling services to all diabetic patients and mobilize resources locally and internationally for the support of the national association. In addition, it tries to establish and strengthen relationship with other associations and organizations linked with its mission and objectives for the benefit of diabetic patients.

The National Diabetic Association conducts sensitization seminars both on the occasion of World Diabetes Day (WDD) and other times of the year. It develops printing materials for public education and diabetic patients. Along with this, it conducts regular meetings of its executive members and congress to strengthen the association.

Finally, Dr. Goitom said that although there is no cure for diabetes, effective treatment exists. The patient should have a healthy life style, regular meals, balanced diet, and must avoid fat, sugar and processed foods. Doing regular exercise at least four to five times a week is recommended. Avoiding alcohol and smoking also contribute to a longer life for a diabetic patient.

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