

Beware: Diabetes Is Now at Our Doorsteps

There is no current data on the prevalence of diabetes in Sierra Leone. However, health professionals can attest to the fact that it is on the increase. According to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), 19 million adults (20-79) are living with diabetes in the IDF Africa Region in 2019. This figure is estimated to increase to 47 million by 2045. It is also known that 45 million adults (20-79) in the IDF Africa Region have Impaired Glucose Tolerance (IGT) which places them at high risk of developing type 2 diabetes. This figure is estimated to reach 110 million by 2045. The IDF Africa Region has the highest percentage of undiagnosed people of all IDF regions - 60% of adults living with diabetes do not know they have it.

Though studies are not available in Sierra Leone to ascertain this, people get diagnosed of diabetes after developing a sore that could not heal or after they have started developing complications of the disease. In Freetown in 2017, 1013 people were assessed for risk of developing type 2 diabetes in the next ten years, the study revealed that 17% were at high risk, and more females were obese compared to males.

Citiglobe Pharmacies Ltd, for the past seven years, has been observing World Diabetes Day (WDD) by undertaking community awareness raising, free screening and sensitization, apart from diabetes walk. This year, the theme for WDD 2020 was: 'Nurses make the difference'. This message is to showcase to national health ministries, globally, the need to invest in capacity building of health care professionals especially nurses, which can play a pivotal role in the prevention and management of diabetes in hospitals. It is important that as health care professionals of this nation, we work as a team in the fight against diseases affecting us. The management of diabetes requires a multicentre approach and a multidisciplinary collective effort amongst many health care professionals of various disciplines.

Apart from lack of knowledge of proper management of diabetes among health care professionals, the infrastructure necessary to offer preventive services, materials for diabetes education, diabetes support group organisations, and special diabetes care management centres, to prevent complications or progression to disability are lacking in the country. The younger population with type 1 diabetes do not have access to insulin or cannot afford expensive insulin vials. Apart from diabetes, hypertension is also a highly prevalent Non-Communicable Disease (NCDs) in Sierra Leone that is claiming lives of Sierra Leoneans. Both these diseases cause kidney failure, which means death for those who cannot afford to undergo weekly dialysis session at the only dialysis centre in Freetown. This has kept me wondering how come urologists or kidney specialists in this country never invested in a dialysis machine to save lives.

Apart from nurses' diabetes education campaign which took place in Freetown, Bo, Makeni and Kenema; Citiglobe Pharmacies Ltd in collaboration with MISHED-SL (a community based organisation - CBOs), embarked on a mass community sensitization and awareness raising in four communities in Makeni, Kenema, Kono and Matotoka starting November 13th to 16th. A total of 100 glucometers was donated among those with diabetes who cannot afford the machine. Many thanks to Mercury International, Pikin Bezness, and PCM for making this diabetes campaign a success.

We are pleading to prospective partners to come on board to support our cause in the fight against diabetes in Sierra Leone. We are ready to offer the trainings necessary to social workers, CBOs and other passionate advocates, to help spread the word on diabetes nationwide. It is also high time that the Government of Sierra Leone stepped up in the fight against common NCDs in Sierra Leone.

On behalf of people living with, and affected by diabetes in Sierra Leone, we are advocating that our national government recognise and advance the role of nurses and other health care professionals in diabetes care. We call on the government to strengthen access to diabetes preventive services, easy

access to care, readily available and affordable health care and management at hard-to-reach areas in Sierra Leone