WHO: Need for Global Dementia Care Planning Is Urgent

A sharp climb in the projected number of people living with dementia—from 55 million in 2019 to 139 million worldwide by 2050—has created an urgent need for countries to plan for their care, according to a World Health Organization (WHO) global status report.

Dementia affects about 8% of women and 5% of men older than 65 years. The condition’s estimated global societal costs were $1.3 trillion in 2019 and are expected to grow to at least $1.7 trillion by 2030. Yet only about one-quarter of countries have a national plan to address this growing concern, the report noted.

Although family members or unpaid caregivers, most of whom are women, devote an average of 5 hours a day to caring for people with dementia, the condition creates complex clinical care needs. A variety of services ranging from primary care to specialty care, long-term care, and palliative care is required.

The report noted that diagnosis is the first step in obtaining care, but fewer than half of the countries that contributed data for it are able to provide their dementia diagnosis rates—a serious shortcoming. After a diagnosis, however, the report indicated that having a primary care clinician involved can help decrease hospital costs and improve informal caregivers’ mental health.

Primary care clinicians can also play an important role in delivering risk reduction strategies, according to the report. For example, the WHO’s guidelines recommend treatment for hypertension, high cholesterol, depression, diabetes, and hearing loss to help prevent dementia. The guidelines also recommend that people adopt lifestyle interventions including increased physical activity, smoking cessation, and a healthful diet to reduce their risks.

Higher Mortality Risk Among Transgender People

Transgender people have a 2-fold higher mortality risk than the general population, a study of about 4600 transgender people in the Netherlands reported.

The researchers analyzed data for 2927 transgender women and 1641 transgender men treated with hormone therapy between 1972 and 2018 at the Amsterdam University Medical Center. The center treats about 90% of transgender people in the country.

Nearly 11% of the transgender women died during the study period, reflecting a mortality risk that’s about twice as high as for men and almost 3 times higher than among women in the general population. Cardiovascular disease, HIV infection, lung cancer, and suicide were the leading causes of death among transgender women in the cohort.

Mortality risk among transgender men was comparable with that of men in the general population but higher than expected compared with general-population women. An increased risk of nonnatural causes of death such as suicide explained the greater mortality risk among transgender men.

Although the increased mortality risk didn’t decline during the study spanning nearly 5 decades, some positive trends emerged: excess deaths didn’t appear to be linked with hormone therapy and deaths from suicide and HIV-related disease decreased during the study period. Improved HIV treatment, greater social acceptance of transgender people, and increased access to gender-affirming care likely contributed to these trends, the authors wrote. Greater social acceptance and more cardiovascular preventive care might help reduce mortality risk among transgender people, they added.

COVID-19 Rolls Back Progress Against HIV, TB, and Malaria

Disruptions in tuberculosis (TB) treatment, HIV prevention, and malaria care during the COVID-19 pandemic threaten to reverse global progress in combating the diseases, according to a report from the Global Fund.

The Global Fund was founded 20 years ago as a nonprofit public-private partnership to tackle HIV, TB, and malaria. It provides $4 billion a year to local efforts in more than 100 countries and tracks progress against the diseases. That progress faltered during the pandemic, the report showed, as the number of HIV tests fell from 134 million in 2019 to 104 million in 2020. Twenty-seven percent fewer men were circumcised in 2020 than in 2019, and 4.5% fewer mothers with HIV received medication while pregnant to prevent transmission to their newborns.

Testing and treatment for TB also declined. Overall, 1 million fewer people received a TB test or treatment in 2020 compared with 2019—a decline that could lead to the development and spread of multidrug-resistant TB, according to the report.

Progress against malaria also stalled, with a roughly 4% decrease in testing and a 0.5% decline in treatment. But some prevention efforts ramped up, including a 17% increase in the number of bed nets distributed, a 3% increase in indoor mosquito spraying, and a 1% increase in pregnant women who received preventive treatment for malaria.

“COVID-19 has been the most significant setback in the fight against HIV, TB and malaria, that we have encountered in the two decades since the Global Fund was established,” the organization’s executive director, Peter Sands, wrote in the report. — Bridget M. Kuehn, MSJ

Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.