The global challenge of stroke is huge with 16 million new cases each year and ≈6 million deaths. The greatest burden is in the developing world where there is a stroke pandemic with rapidly increasing stroke incidence and aging of populations. The World Stroke Organization (WSO) is recognized as the lead global organization for stroke by the World Health Organization. Our mission is to reduce the global burden of stroke through prevention, treatment, and long-term care. Our aims are to foster best standards of practice to increase stroke awareness, to influence policies for prevention of stroke and vascular dementia, to improve health services, to provide education through collaboration with private and public organizations, to facilitate stroke research, to advocate and foster systems for the long-term support of stroke survivors and their families. The WSO Board of Directors has 40 members, a geographical balance of all world regions, and includes individual stroke professionals, representatives of regional stroke societies, and stroke support organizations.

The WSO has a major focus on global policy, working in our official relationship with the World Health Organization. We also collaborate with major regional stroke organizations, including the American Stroke Association, the European Stroke Organization, and the Asian Pacific Stroke Organization. The WSO has been recently granted special consultative status by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Collectively, the Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) constitute the greatest causes of mortality and disability in the world. Many risk factors and strategies are common to all NCDs, and WSO works closely with other related NGOs and the NCD Alliance. In May 2013, the World Health Assembly in Geneva endorsed the World Health Organization Global action plan for the prevention and control of NCDs 2013–2020 and adopted the global monitoring framework on NCDs with an overarching aim to reduce NCD mortality by 25% by 2025. The global targets include attention to all major risk factors for stroke, also anticoagulation for atrial fibrillation and organized stroke care in stroke units. A global coordination mechanism for NCD actions will be developed at World Health Organization and at the United Nations.

The WSO has formed an alliance with the World Hypertension League and is also involved in promotion of salt and tobacco reduction. We strongly advocate organized care in stroke units, which are cost-effective, with validated benefits in low-income countries. Because stroke is a leading cause of disability, the WSO has supported the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This is a vital framework for creating legislation and policies around the world that embraces the rights and dignity of all people living with disability.

Our World Stroke Campaign provides education, support, and advocacy for stroke survivors, families, and healthcare professionals. Our annual World Stroke Day on October 29 each year promotes stroke awareness and education to the international community. It was launched at the instigation of Vladimir Hachinski, as part of a call to action and has a 1 in 6 theme, representing the 1 in 6 people in the World who will have a stroke in their lifetime. The WSO has a universal symbol representing the connectivity between clinicians, patients and carers, the indigo-colored stroke solidarity string. Stroke support organizations play a key role in the WSO but are lacking in many developing regions. A WSO toolkit teaches people how to set up stroke support organizations in any setting. The WSO is developing a global Bill of Rights for stroke patients and carers, who are writing this document and determining their priorities. It will consider survivor rights across the continuum from prevention to acute care, rehabilitation, and long-term support in line with the WSO mission and will be launched at the World Stroke Congress in Istanbul in October 2014.

Millions of stroke survivors around the world are at risk of recurrent stroke and most have some degree of disability. Therefore, we have helped develop the Post-Stroke Checklist to assist stroke professionals. This identifies 11 important domains, including secondary stroke prevention, activities of daily living, mobility, mood, spasticity, cognition, pain, incontinence, communication, life after stroke, and relationships with family.

The biannual World Stroke Campaign meetings move around the world and provide a stimulus for regional stroke developments, particularly in developing regions. Our 2012 World Stroke Campaign was held in Brazil and our 2014 World Stroke Campaign will be held in Istanbul, including joint symposia with the World Health Organization, World Federation of Neurology, World Hypertension League, European Stroke Organization, American Stroke Association, and the Asian Pacific Stroke Organization. The scientific program is exciting, with both a global and regional focus. The WSO has an official journal, the International Journal of Stroke (IJS) and a free online educational resource, the World Stroke Academy. Both of our research and educational journals are available without cost to members. Our fees have been greatly reduced to stimulate membership. We are aiming for 2000 members by the end of 2013. We invite you to be part of the WSO and join us in our collective efforts to reduce the global burden of stroke. You can join via our Website http://www2.kenes.com/wso-news/August_2013/Pages/Home.aspx.

Disclosures

None.

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