

indicators. Otherwise policies, programs, interventions and services that seek to change cultures of violence will operate in the same vacuum as they have been for decades past.

References

1. Department of Health and Ageing, *National Men's Health Policy* <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/national+mens+health-1> [cited 16 July 2009].
2. Sen G, Ostlin P, George, A. *Unequal, Unfair, Ineffective and Inefficient: Gender Inequity in Health: Why it exists and how we can change it*. Final Report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health, Sept 2007. Available at: http://www.who.int/social_determinants/themes/womenandgender/en/index.html [cited 15 July 2009].
3. WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health. *Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health*. Final report of the CSDH, Geneva, WHO, 2008.
4. Keleher, H. and Franklin, L. (2008). Changing gendered norms about women and girls at the level of household and community: a review of the evidence. *Global Public Health*, Vol 3, Supplement 1: 42-57.
5. VicHealth and Victorian Department of Human Services (2004) *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence. A summary of findings*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Carlton, Vic, Australia.
6. National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. *Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009–2021*, Canberra, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. April 2009. Available at <http://apo.org.au/research/time-action-national-councils-plan-australia-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-childr> [cited 16 July 2009].
7. Australian Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), *Developing a Men's Health Policy for Australia: Setting the Scene*; Canberra, 2008. <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-mens-policy> [cited 16 July 2009].

The Oxford Health Alliance gives young people a voice on chronic disease

Fred Hersch, Steve Leeder

*Menzies Centre for Health Policy, University of Sydney,
New South Wales*

Hester Rice

*Events and Youth Workstream Project Manager,
Oxford Health Alliance, London, United Kingdom*

One only has to read the newspapers (let alone any journal related to health) to be confronted by the epidemic of chronic disease. Whether it be stories of the rise of childhood obesity or the escalating costs of chronic disease, the truth it seems is out there. The challenge for politicians and the policy makers in general is how to address these growing concerns and begin the transition towards a society that promotes health and well being. While discussion begins, a significant population is being left out of the policy debate on this serious issue: young people – those who represent the generations (X, Y) who will be responsible for picking up the bill and who will need to be engaged in any serious efforts towards addressing the problem.

The emergence of chronic disease is a truly global challenge. A recent World Health Organization report, *Preventing Chronic Disease: A Vital Investment*, confirms what many have known: an estimated 388 million people will die from chronic diseases worldwide over the next 10 years¹ and 80% of this morbidity and mortality will occur in developing countries. The way we live is making us sick. And we are exporting ill health. The good news is that the solution is at hand. Prevention works.

In the developed world, preventative action over the past decades has meant that we have been able to defer the major effects of these conditions until the later years. As our population ages, the time bomb is ticking. Aside from the human cost, chronic disease and its associated morbidity has terrifying economic consequences. The burden of this will be placed on the shoulders of the younger generations – the gen X and Ys. Their voice needs to be considered in the policy discussion.

The Oxford Health Alliance enables collaboration between experts and activists from a wide range of disciplines in order to raise awareness and change behaviours, policies and perspectives about the epidemic of chronic disease at every level of society. This is a debate about the type of societies we want to live in in the future. Nothing less. In 2008, the Oxford Health Alliance established the Young Professionals

Network (YPN) to engage future leaders in the discussion about chronic disease and preventative strategies. A workshop held in Sydney in the lead up to the OxHA Summit in 2008 explored the attitudes towards health and the environments among this group.

Among the range of issues discussed at the workshop, the workplace was recognised as having a vital role to play in the battle against chronic disease. An unhealthy society is an unproductive one. Businesses (and the economy) are directly affected by lost productivity due to chronic disease. For young professionals, this poses an opportunity – to shift the focus from hours worked to a model of maximising productive hours spent in the office. Promoting health and wellbeing in the workplace would lead to more productive employees – and probably happier, more satisfied ones, too. After all, it is the environment in which we spend so much of our productive lives. The challenge for business is to respond to these changing needs. By encouraging workplace environments and practices that encourage health and well-being (encouraging exercise programs as part of KPIs for example) businesses could create an incentive for recruiting and maintaining staff. Perhaps the public sector could take a lead on this issue. How many health professionals (doctors, nurses, allied health and others) charged with the health of the population currently work in environments that do little to promote their health and well-being?

Other areas that were important included the familiar themes of making healthy food choices the easy choices and making cities that promote our health – bike friendly societies, access to public transport and open spaces. The importance of community and connections was a theme that resonated as the group envisaged a future society that was focused on well-being that included our mental health.

The road ahead is paved with challenges. Not least of these is building the awareness within society of the challenges faced and the actions that need to be taken. If we are going to build the right future, one that focuses on prevention and the role that the environment in all its forms has to play in promoting health, the leaders of tomorrow should be engaged in the discussion from the beginning. Freed of the self-interested arguments that often derail cross sectoral discussion, the YPN workshop offered a real opportunity for young professionals to engage in meaningful discussion about issues that affect their futures. We should do more to encourage discussion among these and other groups. It is their future we are talking about after all.

Acknowledgements

Andy Wright – Research Assistant, Oxford Health Alliance
Katy Cooper – Senior Project Manager, Oxford Health Alliance.

Financial disclosure

All of the authors have done paid consultancy/work with the Oxford Health Alliance.

Reference

1. Tunstall-Pedoe H. *Preventing Chronic Diseases. A Vital Investment: WHO Global Report*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2005. pp 200. CHF 30.00. ISBN 92 4 1563001. Also published on http://www.who.int/chp/chronic_disease_report/en. Int J Epidemiol. (cited Jul 19 2006).

Correspondence

Fred Hersch, c/o Menzies Centre for Health Policy,
Victor Coppleson Building (D02), The University of Sydney,
New South Wales. Fax: (02) 9351 5204;
e-mail: fredhersch@med.usyd.edu.au