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# Opportunistic blood pressure screening: the Pakistan experience

Heartfile

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The prevention and control of cardiovascular diseases, which are projected to be the No. 1 killer in the developing world by 2010, is one of the foremost public health challenges of our times. Fortunately, cardiovascular diseases can be prevented through cost-effective measures involving simple lifestyle changes. This realization has been the impetus for the creation of Heartfile,

Pakistan (<http://www.heartfile.org>) (see articles in the June 2001 and December 2001 issues of Heartbeat). Heartfile has initiated changes at the national health policy level, with projects plugging into major State-owned national primary health care programmes (<http://www.heartfile.org/lodhran.htm>).

The most recent initiative is the Heartfile JC project in Jhelum and Chakwal districts (<http://www.heartfile.org/jc.htm>). The project, which targets a population of two million people, seeks to train

health service providers in opportunistic screening for high blood pressure and also includes an active community and school health component. The project has an experimental design, using other communities as controls for tangible comparisons, and has been undertaken with public-sector institutional support, linked to a long-term institutional plan. Unlike conventional training, this programme targets physicians based in remote towns, who have to function within given resource and mobility con-

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straints, and who do not have opportunities for academic study outside their own geographical area. It also focuses on strengthening the role of non-physician health providers. The training exposes service providers to new ways of thinking.

The beneficiaries are trained in opportunistic blood pressure screening and various aspects of prevention involving

lifestyle modification. The essence of the training is preventive care. Workshops are organized in different venues throughout the districts, aiming to train over 600 health service providers. Prominent members of Pakistan's community of cardiologists participate in the workshops as master trainers. Training curricula for the workshops have been developed by Heartfile in collaboration with Futures Group Europe (a UK-based social marketing agency) and the WHO Programme on Cardiovascular Diseases and incorporate the WHO package for management of cardiovascular risk in hypertensive patients in low-resource settings.

Each health provider completing the training will receive a signboard

inscribed with the Heartfile logo. Members of the public will be encouraged by the advocacy and communications campaign to look for a practitioner with this logo. A total of 600 outdoor signs will be deployed.

The Heartfile JC project is an example of a low-resource-setting approach to the prevention of cardiovascular disease which highlights the importance of effective partnerships which optimize time and resources. Impact assessment and evaluation of the project will help us to fine-tune this approach so that it can be reproduced in similar cultural settings.

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