

Talking Points of Dr. Myint Htwe, Union Minister for Health and Sports at the 9th International Conference on Public Health among Greater Mekong Sub Regional Countries

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- Greetings
- My warmest welcome to my colleagues Public Health professionals
- I am pleased to give the opening address at this 9th International Conference on Public Health among Greater Mekong Sub regional countries.
- Myanmar is proud to host this conference in Yangon.
- The theme of the conference, which is *"adapting healthy lifestyle: combating NCD"* is all the more appropriate as we are observing increasing trend of NCD and its economic and social implications in many countries in the Greater Mekong sub-regional countries as well as all over the world.
- Developing countries must take this scenario of increasing trend of NCD as a serious and dire warning or wake up call if we would like a country to prosper and develop in several fronts.
- If we miss this opportunity to tackle the increasing menace of NCD, we will be facing uncontrollable social, medical and economic implications in future years. We could not afford to do so.
- We need to nip the bud off at an early stage and as soon as possible.
- Myanmar is doing all out to detect early cases of Diabetes, Hypertension and servicing elderly health care at Community Health Clinics, located all over the country. However, we are reviewing the effectiveness for improving the

community health care services. We are also aware that we need to do more for improving this early preventive services for NCD.

- We are also enhancing the health literacy level of our population especially those residing in hard-to-reach areas, underserved and remote places with the objective of improving overall population health, i.e., especially to reduce the incidence of NCD and commonly occurring communicable diseases.
- We firmly believe that only through increasing the knowledge base and expanding the knowledge horizon of the community, we would be able to improve population health.
- At the same time, we are strengthening public health approaches and fine-tuning the strategies to improve public health perspective of various health care programs as well as increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the health care delivery system. In other words, we are establishing a firm and steady public health system in the country.
- I am confident that this conference will give a plethora of information related to NCD in terms of what other countries are fighting against this scourge.
- We should consider all the experiences and knowledge emanating out of the conference to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of NCD prevention and control strategies and interventions.
- I have made a quick review of all the topics that will be presented and discussed at the conference.
- I am very delighted and noticed that it covers the whole spectrum of NCD apart from other topics of special interest to public health domain.

- I am planning to have miniature seminars, forums and brain storming sessions at various states and regions of the country based on the discussion topics and the outcomes of the conference.
- This will rekindle the importance of NCD and health care workers working at different hierarchical levels of the health care delivery system will be stimulated for paying more attention on preventive aspects of NCD.
- The Ministry of Health and Sports will be very serious about NCD and its allied or associated diseases and implications in the months to come.
- Ladies and Gentlemen,
- I will not be wrong if I propose that each country has to review its existing strategies and interventions on NCD whether they are still relevant and appropriate in the context of the changing epidemiological situation NCD and other related entities and scenarios. We should also concomitantly do for the communicable diseases and zoonotic diseases as well.
- We should not do "business as usual". We need to do innovative thinking, out-of-the-box thinking or lateral thinking if we really want our public health strategies and interventions to be effective and efficient and also in line with the changing context and changing behavior of the population at large.
- As per the theme of the conference, we need to be careful about the food that we eat and environment that we live, apart from behavioral and life styles changes.
- Here involvement and cooperation of food, cigarettes and alcohol industries is crucial. I know that it is easier said than done because industrial perspectives towards NCD are at variance with the objectives of the Ministry of Health and Sports and overall objectives of various health programs in the countries.

- However, we should try collectively so that people will be consuming less cigarettes, less alcohol, but good quality and wholesome food.
- That being said we need proactive involvement, collaboration and support of different disciplines and domains related to NCD incidence.
- Ladies and Gentlemen,
- This year conference is organized by the University of Public Health, Myanmar and with the support from HelpAge International, Myanmar and many like-minded organizations and agencies. On behalf of MoHS, I would appreciate and thank them profusely to be able to conduct such a big conference. This is not that easy. Several logistics, administrative, management and technical issues need to be sorted out and streamlined. I therefore thank the conference organizers wholeheartedly.
- I would also like to request the participants to continuously support the GMS Public Health Academic Network which had been established since September 2012. The objective of the network is aiming for a shared vision of achieving the highest possible level of health among the people in the Greater Mekong sub-region. In fact, the institutions involved in the network is the strongest foundation for improving the public health domain in Greater Mekong region.
- May I take this opportunity to mention the specific objectives of this conference because they are highly relevant to the need of the time. These are:
 - To provide opportunities and platform to share and discuss research findings, ideas and experiences and lessons on healthy lifestyle and combating NCD

- To raise awareness about the situation and challenges of NCD for achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC)
- To enhance quality of surveillance and research on prevention and control of NCD
- To strengthen collaboration on addressing promoting healthy life style on combating NCD.
- I would also like to read out the themes of previous conferences because they are so relevant and important:
 1. PHC in globalization
 2. Challenges and opportunities for collaboration of public health training and research in globalization
 3. Global prevention of Public Health challenges among Greater Mekong sub-region
 4. Emerging public health issues among the Greater Mekong sub-region: challenge and opportunities for global collaboration
 5. Evidenced-based Health Policy: current status and future prospects
 6. Health service system in a Borderless Community: Human Resource Development for a District Health System.
 7. International collaboration for evidenced-based policy making and public health.
 8. Moving towards Universal Health Coverage: strengthening quality of care.
- The reason why I am recapitulating all the themes of previous conferences is that we should not forget all these highly relevant themes.

- These are live themes. These are not one time affair or one time theme. We need to revisit one or two themes each in future conferences, as part of the agenda, to see the progress of the already selected themes in Mekong region countries.
- I would also like to put on record my appreciation for the very aptly identified sub-themes for this conference. These are:
 - Strengthening Health Policy and Systems for NCD
 - Universal Health Coverage for combating NCD
 - Evidence for Prevention and Control of NCD
 - Promoting Healthy Life Styles for NCD
- It appears to me that all four sub-themes are equally important and we need to handle four sub-themes in the coming months and years to come in a most efficient and effective manner.
- What is important in public health is “a good networking in addition to effective and efficient coordination among the entities involved in public health network”.
- I would like to emphasize that if we really want to improve our public health strategies and interventions, we must do implementation research or other relevant research as a matter of so-called "compulsory activities". Only then the public health strategies and interventions are suitable and in alignment with the changing scenarios.
- If we would like to reduce the burden of NCD, we need to change the life styles which are not conducive to a healthy human being. This is easier said than done.
- The best approach is to start the health life style from the very young age, especially primary school going age or primary school students. It would be

less effective if we try to change the bad habits of young adults. Therefore, strategies leading to health promoting schools are one of the effective *modus operandi* to have a big cohort of healthy lifestyle practicing middle and high school students. These groups of students can also serve as a positive peer pressure exerting groups to their parents at home.

- This cascading effect may ensure to have a healthy lifestyle practicing population.
- It is very much satisfying that public health professionals of the Mekong sub-regional countries had conducted several relevant research by way of observing the titles of the papers to be presented at the conference.
- As I have alluded to earlier, in conjunction with the review of strategies and interventions for prevention and control of NCD, we also need to review the budget allocated by the government on NCD prevention and control program as well as its allied sub domains. We need more proportional allocation of budget for NCD programs.
- We should also target environmental factors, such as air pollution, water pollution or environmental degradation which may lead to occurrence of some NCD and its affiliated conditions. That being said, the collaboration with relevant ministries has come to the forefront.
- In other words, I am positioning or driving towards the fact that unlike CD, NCD needs to be tackled in a phase wise, step wise and holistic approach while taking into consideration the factors which are within the purview of the MoHS. Unlike CD, NCD take longer time to contain the situation.
- Having said all these, we should also note the fact that how could we apply the findings of the studies to suit the requirement of the local context? I do

not want these study findings or presentations to be evaporated after the conference for no apparent reason.

- I want to especially urge the MMR public health professionals attending the conference to take and get the most out of the conference. I even want to request the conference organizers that post-mortem meeting should be conducted as to its utility of the findings of all the relevant papers for further consideration for implementation in Myanmar.
- In conclusion, I just want to say that the conference can stimulate or instil the interest of young medical doctors to pursue public health as their career.
- I am confident that the networking of public health institutions as well as public health professionals will become stronger and more sustainable after the conference.
- I would also like to convey my good wishes to key note speakers, panelists, dean of health institutes, paper presenters and poster presenters.
- Last but not the least, I would like to thank the officials of HelpAge International and also organizers and agencies, like-minded organizations who had supported to make this conference a reality.