**Ways to reduce the burden of disease — every community pharmacist has a part!**

*What’s in store at this year’s World Congress of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences? The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) gave a community pharmacist a preview of the programme. Here’s what he thought.*

When a baby is born in your country, how many years in full health can he or she be expected to live? Or, to look at it in another way, how much time can he or she expect to spend in poor health? This is the basis of HALE (health adjusted life expectancy) a measure to express disease burden.

Reducing the collective disease burden resulting from all diseases around the world — in other words, the “global burden of disease” — is an essential, yet daunting, ambition. And you may ask yourself: “What impact can I, a humble community pharmacist, have on such a vast undertaking?” Yet the International Pharmaceutical Federation is asking every pharmacist to rise to this challenge under the auspices of the 76th World Congress of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences taking place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, later this year.

The list of top 10 causes of death in each country is influenced by that country’s income. In high-income countries, dementia ranks number 4 whereas malaria and tuberculosis feature in the top 10 for low-income countries. The FIP congress will give particular focus to a number of these major contributors to the global burden. For example, experts will share the latest knowledge in dementia and the impact of early intervention, and participants will also be able to learn about new developments in malaria. In addition, developments in the treatment of chronic pain — a common cause of poor health — will be presented.

Much of the global burden of disease is caused by heart disease, stroke, HIV/AIDS, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, diabetes and diarrhoeal disease. All of these conditions are treatable with medicines and it is the pharmacist’s raison d’être to improve the outcomes of drug treatments. Yet our potential does not end here.

**Increase health literacy**

One way to have an effect on global disease is to help increase health literacy among the general public. Donald Nutbeam, professor of public health at the University of Sydney, Australia, will speak on that. He says that a high proportion of consumers lack even the most basic skills to optimise decision-making in health care. “This group are less likely to respond to health education and prevention services and are significantly disadvantaged in the successful management of illness.” Professor Nutbeam will outline a range of strategies for community pharmacists to identify, manage and improve health literacy at their practices.

**Campaign to promote health**

Promotional campaigns can strengthen the profession and increase the impact of pharmacy on global health. But community pharmacists know that there is a general lack of awareness of their potential role in this area. A congress session will seek to address that. Paul Sinclair, president of the New South Wales Branch of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, will describe an interactive, multimedia campaign in Australia entitled “Discover more: Ask your pharmacist”, outlining how it illustrates the potential of community pharmacy in the delivery of primary health-care services, extended patient care, minor ailments advice and medication compliance information. Not only are patient outcomes improved, but, he says, the government also increased its investment in community pharmacy. Perhaps this presentation will inspire similar campaigns in your own country.

**Improve adherence and care continuity**

Of course, patient outcomes are always improved if adherence to treatment can be assured. Non-adherence is a major challenge to health care, and has been associated with the emergence of resistance to antibiotics. A reason for non-adherence can be patients believing that they are suffering adverse effects to medication, when often they are not. So community pharmacists need to be vigilant. Mimi Darko, of the Ghanaian Food and Drugs Authority, says that a lack of adherence can go unnoticed if health care professionals do not play the pivotal role of engaging effectively with their patients. At the congress, she will explain how a system of patient-focused pharmacovigilance gives pharmacists the opportunity to monitor patients closely and report any suspected adverse events. She says: “Early detection of patient safety issues may help to boost patient confidence in their therapy, improving adherence and resulting in overall better treatment outcomes.”

Treatment outcomes are also improved if there is continuity of care between various parts of the health service. This is particularly true for cancer patients. Sandra Cuellar, clinical assistant professor at the University of Illinois Hospital, USA, says one of the most important aspects of caring for a cancer patient is synchronisation and communication among the health care team. At the congress she will explain how pharmacists, including community pharmacists, play an integral role in optimising and coordinating cancer therapy for patients.

**Make the most of social media**

Information about the global burden of disease, that until relatively recently could only be shared with difficulty across national borders, can today be broadcast worldwide via the internet and disseminated instantly through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Have you thought of harnessing the power of social media?

Ash Soni, president of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, UK, will talk about social media networks in a congress session hosted by FIP’s Community Pharmacy Section. He says: “With a whole host of social media channels now easily available through tablets and smart phones, pharmacists have never had so many accessible ways to share their experiences and learn from the knowledge of others.” Social media networks, he adds, are not just talking shops. “Used effectively and professionally they are direct routes to practice information, mentoring and peer advice, training and funding opportunities, as well as the latest news, views and events.” Come to this session and you will learn a lot.

**Prevention, screening and more**

Pharmacists can also make important contributions to reducing the global burden of disease through detection and prevention — there will be congress sessions on rapid diagnostic tests that are helping to ensure patients receive treatment at an earlier stage with the expectation of a better outcome, and on public health programmes. Participants will also be informed about health screening, caring for vulnerable patients, pharmacists’ role in managing the never-ending threat of emerging infectious diseases, medicines waste and recycling, and becoming involved in humanitarian projects. In short, this year’s FIP congress will show you the wide range of activities that pharmacists can undertake, new tools to improve lives, and the impact of actions.

Carmen Peña, FIP president, believes in you. She says: “Pharmacists are active agents in promoting health and preventing disease. This is especially true of community pharmacists owing to their accessibility and the high level of trust in them by the public.” Every time you chat to your patients about their medicines, talk to prescribers about optimising patients’ therapy, ensure possible adverse reactions are reported to the appropriate agencies, and contribute to public health initiatives, your actions have an effect. Lots of small local deeds will add up to a large worldwide effect, and in this way the global disease burden can be tackled bit by bit.

To see what else this year’s FIP congress has to offer visit [www.fip.org/buenosaires2016](http://www.fip.org/buenosaires2016).