PRESS RELEASE

UNRWA commemorates World Health Day 2016: “We can beat diabetes.”

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East Jerusalem

Every year, UNRWA commemorates World Health Day (WHD) on 7 April. First established by the World Health Organization in 1948, the main aim of this day is to raise global awareness about pressing health issues. This year’s WHD, with the theme ‘Beat Diabetes’, focuses on diabetes as a threat to the health and well-being of people around the world. The main aim is to raise awareness of the disease and the ways in which it can be prevented and, for those with the disease, on how to effectively manage their condition by following a healthy lifestyle to avoid complications.

WHO estimates that about 415 million adults worldwide, equivalent to 1 in 11 adults, have diabetes and that it claims as many as 1.5 million lives every year. Many of these deaths are preventable by engaging in regular physical activity, reaching and maintaining a good weight, eating healthy food, increasing access to diagnosis, and self-management. A healthy lifestyle could prevent up to 70 per cent of type 2 diabetes. Unfortunately, one in two (46.5 per cent) adults around the world with diabetes are undiagnosed.

“It has been recognized that the main causes of death and illness among Palestine refugees are non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as diabetes; cardiovascular diseases; and cancer,” says Dr. A. Seita, the Director of Health at UNRWA Headquarters. He adds: “UNRWA has been providing NCD care for diabetes and hypertension since 1992 in its primary health-care centres. Diabetes care includes screening of high-risk groups, diagnosis and treatment. By the end of 2015, about 136,000 Palestine refugee diabetic patients were registered at UNRWA health centres in the Agency’s five Fields of Operations, including the

Gaza Strip, West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. More serious is the fact that the numbers are steadily increasing by 5.0 per cent every year."

The ever-increasing cost of diabetes care is a big challenge given the Agency's scarce resources. "The data for 2015 revealed that out of the total expenditure on medicines by UNRWA, 46.0 per cent was spent on medicines for the treatment of NCDs," says Dr. Seita. "In addition, for diabetic Palestine refugee patients who were over the age of 18, about 21.0 per cent were current smokers and 11.8 per cent were ex-smokers. In addition, 25.1 per cent were obese and 65.8 per cent were overweight. In addition to eating unhealthy food and physical inactivity, smoking and excessive body weight are important risk factors for this disease. The estimated rate of control of the disease based on a standard test was only less than 50 per percent."

With healthy lifestyle practices, this rate should be higher, and fewer complications stemming from diabetes should be experienced by diabetic patients. "Late complications, which are serious diseases that develop gradually, affecting the heart and blood vessels, eyes, kidneys and nerves, threaten the life and the quality of life for all diabetic patients who do not control their disease," Dr. Seita concludes.

On 7 April, as in all parts of the world, UNRWA will observe WHD 2016 through a series of activities to raise awareness among Palestine refugees on the epidemic.

– Ends –

Background information

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA Programme Budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall, projected for 2016 to stand at US$ 81 million. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals.

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance .

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