

15

European
Conference
on Public
Health

The Future
of Public Health
in the Unified
Europe

Conference proceedings

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Oct. 11-13 '07

FINLANDIA HALL,
HELSINKI
WWW.EUPHA.ORG

ISBN (PDF) ISBN 978-951-33-2270-0
ISSN (PDF) 1795-8105

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16 Chronic Diseases

The 2007 EUPHA conference in Helsinki was very successful for the EUPHA section on Chronic Diseases (ESCD). During the first year of its existence as the regular EUPHA section it was able to prepare a varied and interesting programme for the 2007 EUPHA conference. The section organised two workshops out of which one was carried out in co-operation with the Task Force on Major and Chronic Diseases of DG SANCO. Three other sessions were devoted to chronic diseases based on best submitted abstracts from all over the Europe. In addition, a track of poster presentations included nineteen posters.

Workshops

The conference programme started with the *joint workshop* of the ESCD and the Morbidity and Mortality Working Party / Task Force on Major and Chronic Diseases (MMWP/TFMCD) of DG SANCO (http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_information/implement/wp/morbidity/task-force_chronic_en.htm). The Task Force on Major and Chronic Diseases is one of the implementing structures of the EU Public Health Programme 2003–08. The workshop aimed to tackle the incomparability of morbidity data at the European level and introduced the development of the accurate health information system concerning the health status of the population in order to improve the health of European citizens. The workshop focused on the first axis of the matrix, presenting some of the major building blocks of the EU Health Information System on morbidity and mortality. In particular, recommendations for implementing population-based registries for stroke and Acute Myocardial Infarction/Acute Coronary Syndrome were presented, as well as activities aimed at harmonizing coding practices of cancer registries.

The *second ESCD workshop* dealt with psychosocial determinants of health and quality of life in the

elderly. The workshop highlighted the importance of raising awareness of the health consequences of the increasing elderly population with special emphasis on preventing chronic diseases and chronic conditions as well as managing physical disability, depression and social isolation. Within this workshop three multicentre projects focussed on prevention of chronic diseases, health promotion and improvements in quality of life in the elderly were presented.

Parallel sessions

The *parallel session 'Socio-economic Inequalities in Chronic Diseases'* analyzed the associations between socioeconomic inequalities and trends in several chronic conditions, such as self-reported depressiveness, coronary heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, cervical cancer and graft survival after kidney transplantation. This session confirmed the persistence of socio-economic disparities in chronic diseases, it however also showed that tailored interventions and policy programmes, resulting for example in increased participation in screening programmes or having equal access to healthcare services, may eliminate these disparities.

The *parallel session 'Psychosocial Variables and Chronic Diseases Control'* elaborated on the role of personality traits in predicting mortality as well as the effects of social support, occupation and culture on psychological well-being. The studies demonstrated that personality factors such as 'hostility', 'antisocial personality' and 'coronary heart disease-prone' personality predicted all-cause mortality. In contrast, the 'cancer-prone' personality, 'rational' personality and 'Type A behaviour' were not significantly associated with mortality. With regard to improvements in psychological well-being adjustment to disease and social support yielded to have positive effects, but the significance of the aspect of social networks on psychological well-be-

ing differs according to the gender and the culture of origin. Furthermore, the studies confirmed the beneficial effect of meeting the occupation needs on psychological well-being in persons suffering from dementia. The studies also show that prevention of such chronic diseases as low back pain may benefit from improving work organization and integrating health promotion and stress management into the more traditional occupational health and safety measures.

The *parallel session 'Cardiovascular Diseases'* dealt with risk factors for cardiovascular disease, trends in acute myocardial infarction case fatality, effects of the Mediterranean diet on cardiovascular disease and the utility of interventions for improving compliance with cardiac medication. With regard to risk factors the studies demonstrated that blood pressure in late adolescence is an important independent risk factor for coronary heart disease and stroke before 55 years of age. Therefore attention to pre-adult blood pressure as a determinant of cardiovascular disease in middle-age onwards should be warranted in future research. The study on the trends in short-term case fatality after a first acute myocardial infarction event and the socioeconomic and geographic inequalities from Scotland provided evidence for socioeconomic inequalities in short-term case fatality and that these socioeconomic gradients are more pronounced at younger ages. The study dealing with a systematic review of the scientific literature on the Mediterranean diet supported the assumption about the protective effects of this diet on cardiovascular diseases. Similarly the outcomes of a study aimed at improving compliance with cardiac medication supported the utility of interventions in preventing coronary heart disease. Finally, a study on screening programmes to identify people at risk for ischemic heart disease showed that screening for risk of ischemic heart disease combined with immediate health counselling was not associated with an increase in anxiety, depression and somatisation. On the contrary, it seemed to have a positive effect, which could be due to professional counselling.

Annual meeting of the EUPHA section on Chronic Diseases

During the annual meeting of the ESCD the section's president introduced the mission and aims of the section as well as its brief history. The ESCD started its existence in 2005 as 'proposed section' and it was established as a 'regular section' at the 14th EUPHA conference in Montreux, Switzerland in 2006. Within this context interesting are the EUPHA database statistics

on the number of persons indicating interest in chronic diseases. In 2005 only 35 people expressed their interest in chronic diseases, in 2006 this number raised to 61 and in 2007 it reached 204 persons. Similarly interesting are the developments in activities of the section. While in 2006 the oral presentations reporting on chronic diseases were included into a track on 'Chronic Diseases and Care for the Elderly', in 2007 the increased number of accepted abstracts enabled to create an independent track on 'Chronic Diseases'. The poster presentation track entitled 'Controlling Epidemics of Chronic Diseases' included 19 posters from 13 European countries. With regard to workshops, in 2006 the section did not succeed in organising a workshop, however in 2007 it organised 2 successful workshops. During the section's annual meeting also plans for the 2008 EUPHA conference in Lisbon took place. The topics for planned workshops included news on health information system on morbidity and mortality in chronic diseases and e-health in general as well as trends in chronic disease care and in particular the patient's self-management. The conference participants also elaborated on more active involvement of the section members during the year, e.g. regular exchange of information using the EUPHA mailman system, development of the section's web-site, plans for common projects. Finally, the selection of the section's vice-president took place. The new section's vice-president became Dr. Coen van Gool from the Netherlands.

Conclusions

All activities organised by the ESCD were of great interest for the conference participants. The sessions within the track as well as the workshops attracted many listeners. On average they were attended by more than 60 persons; and actually during some presentations there was not enough space in the rooms so some people were even sitting on the floor. The presentations within the sessions and workshops were of very good quality and provoked vivid and stimulating discussions. In addition, the workshops served as a kind of advertisement for the ESCD, because some of the conference participants heard about the existence of the section during the workshops for the first time and after the workshops they asked for more details and wanted to become members of the section. All in all, the increase of section's activities, the growing number of oral presentations in parallel sessions as well as the number of posters indicate that the epidemics of chronic diseases generates an increasing interest in the scientific public health community.