WHL NEWSLETTER

News from the World Hypertension League (WHL).
An organisation in official relations with the World Health Organization

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Profile

The Cardiovascular Diseases Unit in the WHO was established in 1959. It has been concerned with hypertension since its early days. The foundations for international epidemiological research into hypertension were laid by describing the criteria for hypertension and recommending standard methods of measurement. These activities determine two main concerns of the WHO hypertension programme: research and research promotion and the standardisation of criteria and methodology, including guidelines for the management of hypertension. Research has revealed that hypertension is a public health problem. This led to the creation of a third major activity area characterised by the involvement of hypertension research and control as a catalysing programme of cardiovascular disease and non-communicable chronic disease and in nationwide control programmes. The activity of the WHO on standardisation has continued through issuing further specifications on terminology and classification, methodology of blood pressure determination and stages of essential hypertension and also by considering some preventive and therapeutic measures. These considerations have been reviewed, extended and presented as a clinical description, together with recommendations for therapy and for the control of hypertension in populations. The preventive aspect of the control of arterial hypertension as a risk factor for coronary heart disease was included in two WHO Expert Committee Reports.

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WHL News

WHL Yearbook 1991

The World Hypertension League has prepared the first edition of a yearbook describing past and current activities of the WHL as well as providing complete information on member organisations and a list of all materials available through the offices of the WHL. The consensus statements on mild hypertension, self-measurement, overweight and physical activity in their relation to hypertension are also included. One copy will reach all Newsletter subscribers under separate cover, and single additional copies can be requested from the Newsletter office.

The Patient Education Project: A Joint WHO/WHL Undertaking

Promotion of patient education is an important commitment of the WHL. It is expected that patient education will develop better once physicians have acquired better skills and stronger motivation. To this effect, WHL held a workshop in 1988 (1). Jointly with the WHO, the WHL is now launching the Patient Education Project. Cen-

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The high prevalence of hypertension in developing countries was noted by the WHO, and recommendations were made to assist those countries in need. Epidemiological research showed hypertension's extent and significance for public health. To respond to this challenge, the WHO has been carrying out an international multi-centre project to prove that community control of hypertension is feasible in varied socioeconomic settings and health care systems.

The WHO's European Region is concerned with hypertension research related to health care. The WHO supported an international project, the INTERSALT Study, and undertook the coordination of the CARDIAC Study (Cardiovascular Diseases and Alimentary Comparison). This latter project was initiated and organised by the WHO Collaborating Centre for Research on Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Diseases at Shimane University. The WHO is also coordinating the MONICA Project (multinational MONItoring of trends and determinants in Cardiovascular disease), which monitors simultaneously cardiovascular mortality, morbidity, case fatality, risk factor levels, and social and behavioural trends within defined communities over a 10-year period. The MONICA Project will hopefully reveal relationships between blood pressure changes in populations as well as trends in mortality from cardiovascular diseases and in the incidence of stroke and acute myocardial infarction. Research has been promoted in the domain of the primary prevention of essential hypertension, and collaborative studies have been undertaken on blood pressure levels among children in various populations and the factors influencing this in childhood.

Hypertension control is an important part of the WHO programme for the prevention of coronary heart disease. The objectives include the reduction of the mean population blood pressure and of the prevalence of uncontrolled high blood pressure. Projects for hypertension control in developing countries have been started in pilot areas as part of an integrated programme on non-communicable diseases, which is being incorporated into the primary health care system and into the social and administrative structure of the community, with the final objective being nationwide application.

An important aspect of the WHO's profile is collaboration with non-governmental organisations. Joint meetings concerning mild hypertension have been undertaken with the ISH. A practical guide for physicians and health workers was produced in 1984, together with a series of guidelines for the management of mild hypertension, which are regularly revised. WHO/ISH meetings are arranged on the prevention of hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases. A strong collaborative bond has formed between the WHL and the WHO.

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Hypertension prevention and control are and will remain part of the foremost activities of WHO's Cardiovascular Diseases Programme.

Reference:
Facts That Convinced Me

The Nature of Hypertension

As a young investigator I witnessed some of the fireworks of the long and famous debate between Robert Platt and George Pickering on the nature of essential hypertension. Pickering's demonstration that, in unselected populations, blood pressure is distributed in a skewed unimodal curve with the tail to the right (see Figure) and his conception of high blood pressure as a quantitative derangement from the norm were strongly resisted in the academic and medical world before becoming the common wisdom and orthodox teaching they are today. His findings opened the way to our modern view of considering hypertension more a cardiovascular risk factor than a disease. In spite of Sir George's initial scepticism on drug treatment of hypertension ("Nor is there any evidence that such measures prolong life-though no doubt it seems longer"), this new view has strongly supported the approach of preventing cardiovascular damage by pharmacologically lowering elevated blood pressure, an approach that has been so successful in the last 20 years. One of the major successes of treating mild and moderate hypertension has indeed been the practical disappearance of severe and malignant hypertension. Nowadays, as many drugs are available for lowering blood pressure and we are rightly exploring whether some of them may have additional benefits, we should not forget that, as George Pickering's blood pressure distribution curve indicates, lowering of elevated blood pressure, i.e. moving the distribution curve to the left, with or without drugs will remain a most important target of medicine and public health.

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Alberto Zanchetti, born in 1926, is Professor of Clinical Medicine at the University of Milan. He has been President of the International Society of Hypertension, of the Italian Society of Hypertension and of the European Society of Clinical Investigation. He is currently on the Scientific Council of the European Society of Hypertension and is an Expert for Cardiovascular Diseases of the WHO. He is an honorary member of various scientific and medical societies and has received several international awards.

Useful Material

Clinical Opportunities for Smoking Intervention: A Guide for the Busy Physician

Smoking may not directly increase blood pressure; however, the presence of hypertension and smoking increases the risk for cardiovascular disease by a factor of five. This guide for smoking intervention can help address this risk factor successfully. It provides a collection of relevant data on smoking and the risk of cancer, obstructive lung disease and atherosclerosis. It also deals directly with the arguments offered frequently when patients are asked to quit. The frequent contacts between physicians and their hypertensive patients provide ample opportunity to put into practice some of the many helpful suggestions this well written booklet offers. Individual copies can be requested from the Information Center, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, Bethesda, MD 20892, USA, or from the WHL Newsletter office.
Diet, Nutrition, and the Prevention of Chronic Disease


Although nutrient deficiency diseases are still prevalent in some countries and are an important cause of ill-health and premature death, nutrient-associated chronic diseases due to an incorrect balance or excess of nutrients are now of significant importance in virtually all countries, developing and developed alike. This report from a WHO Study Group discusses the relations between the intake of nutrients that should not be consumed in excess and the incidence of chronic diseases, in particular coronary heart disease, various cancers and diabetes. The report then considers the implications for agricultural and economic policies. The wealth of data and inclusion of up-to-date literature on cardiovascular diseases provides useful information for every programme planner and researcher interested in hypertension control.