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The News Editor,

PRESS RELEASE: WORLD HEART DAY

Cardiovascular disease remains a significant public health challenge accounting for majority of the reported non-communicable disease (NCD) related mortalities globally. Estimates show that these disorders associated with the heart and blood vessels account for over 50% of NCD burden worldwide with more of the disease related deaths recorded in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Sub Saharan Africa remains a hotspot for CVD deaths, having a significant surge within the last two decades with these numbers projected to double by 2030 if drastic measures are not taken to stem the tide.

This public health challenge is largely attributed to an additive effect of factors relating to urbanization, change in lifestyle and steadily aging populations. The notable rapid urbanization of our hitherto indigenous way of life has brought with it changes in diets, a sudden shift to sedentary living with attendant increasing levels of stress which drives the incidence of CVDs.

The situation in Ghana mirrors that of the sub-region with CVDs leading in NCD-related deaths in 2021 based on data from the District Health Information Management System (DHIMS 2). This phenomenon has been consistent as far back as 2017 with the major driving factor being prevalent uncontrolled hypertension.

It is worth noting that efforts have been made over the years to remedy the situation but the intended outcomes are yet to be realized. In 2011, a comprehensive policy for NCD was developed to tackle this public health threat which was later revised in 2022 based on the dynamic factors driving the problem. Nonetheless, ineffective implementation continues to hamper the realization of

progressive and significant decline in CVDs and its related mortalities. Moreover, the inability to significantly scale-up interventions remain a daunting hurdle in achieving the desired outcome of significantly reducing incidence of CVDs.

Notwithstanding, there are still areas within reach that needs emphasis in the fight against CVDs. One of such is the awareness and educational campaigns on these conditions which needs ramping up and stressing on lifestyles that promote their incidence. This effort will be relevant as more of the citizenry will be empowered to take steps towards prevention or seek early medical attention at disease onset, which are essential for CVD prevention and control.

Additionally, the incorporation of wellness programs at places of work will significantly contribute to the physical and mental well-being of the population by combating elevated stress levels and the rise in sedentary lifestyle.

Moreover, strengthening health systems, community engagement and empowerment, policy advocacy, and supporting context-based research as evidence for CVD prevention are important in mitigating the disease burden.

Therefore, in celebrating this year's World Heart Day, let us be mindful of the theme "Use Heart for Action". This is a call towards supporting individuals to care for their heart and empowering them to urge leadership to take cardiovascular health seriously. The action is a deliberate and impactful execution of efforts to influence policies and advocate for behavioral change and physical activity.

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