

Seeing is Believing

DR TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

"Seeing is believing" — goes the old proverb, but Standard Chartered Bank has given a new meaning to this old saying.

Seeing is Believing (SiB) is a global initiative to help tackle avoidable blindness. SiB is a partnership between Standard Chartered Bank and the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). IAPB is the leading umbrella organisation for NGOs working in the field of eye care. Together with the World Health Organisation, it launched the 'Vision 2020 — The Right to Sight', the global campaign to eliminate avoidable blindness by 2020.

Through SiB, Standard Chartered Bank has pledged to continue its existing partnership with Sightsavers to strengthen eye care facilities in Bangladesh by investing USD one million over five years in the Dhaka Urban Comprehensive Eye Care project (DUCEC).

There are 150,000 new cataract cases in Bangladesh each year, creating a huge backlog of untreated cases which Seeing is Believing, Sightsavers and partners like ORBIS International, Hellen

Keller International, Christian Blindness Mission (CBM) International, the Fred Hollows Foundation are working to address.

SiB has enjoyed phenomenal success since its inception in 2003. It was launched to help celebrate the Bank's 150th anniversary. That year, it exceeded its target to raise enough money for 28,000 sight restorations by double, raising enough money for 56,000 sight restorations.

Since then, Seeing is Believing has grown at an astonishing rate. By 2010, SiB will have reached a 10 million people through a variety of initiatives to both prevent and cure blindness. SiB expanded to deal with prevention as well as cure as this is the only sustainable way to try and tackle the increasing numbers of avoidably blind.

Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex visited Dhaka from March 23-25, 2009 in her capacity as Patron of Vision 2020: The Right to Sight. She is particularly involved with charities relating to children, disabilities and communication problems and is a Global Ambassador for the IAPB.

The Countess was in Bangladesh as a guest of the



NASIR ALI MAMUN

HRH The Countess of Wessex is seen smiling while visiting Islamia Eye Hospital to catch sight of eye care at the institute. Standard Chartered Bank's community investment programme "Seeing is Believing" supports the institute in conjunction with Sightsavers International and local partners.

disability agency Sightsavers International and Standard Chartered Bank. Over the course of three days, she looked at the progress that is being made in Dhaka with regards to delivering eye care services to some of the hardest to access communities in the city.

She met Professor Ruhul Haque, Honorable Minister

of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of Bangladesh as well as leading representatives from the international eye care agencies operating in Bangladesh.

At an informal meeting at the British High Commission in Dhaka, she listened to the conversation among the government officials, representative from

Ophthalmological Society of Bangladesh (OSB), members of INGO Forum operating in Bangladesh, pioneer ophthalmologists of the country. In the fruitful meeting, the mechanisms of increasing eye care facilities in both public and private set up in Bangladesh were discussed. HRH the Countess asked the British High

Commissioner to explore the possibilities of DFID's involvement in eye care sector.

Dr Wahidul Islam, Country Director of Sightsavers International in Bangladesh commented, "Blindness and poverty are inextricably linked. People with disability are more likely to be unemployed and tend to have fewer opportunities to access a quality education. We hope that the visit by HRH The Countess of Wessex will inspire the Government of Bangladesh and all key stakeholders to redouble their efforts when it comes to ensuring eye care for all."

October 2008 marks the launch of Seeing is Believing — A New Vision. Standard Chartered Bank will invest USD 20 million to fund the development of sustainable eye care services in less advantaged areas of 20 cities. This new phase of the programme will give poor, marginalised populations access to complete services from cataract surgery, to preventative treatment and specialised medical interventions. The President of IAPB described the work proposed as a 'trail blazer' corporate social responsibility initiative in this area.



Tulsi — The silent 'super-power'

These days, many people do not give importance to natural herbs and 'Tulsi' is one of them. Besides its health benefits, this is one of the most sacred herbs of Hindu religion.

Tulsi has been revered in our subcontinent for over five thousand years, as a healing balm for body and mind and is known to bestow an amazing number of health benefits.

Tulsi has traditionally been used in this region as a medicinal herb to treat everything from coughs and bronchitis to skin diseases and malarial fever. It is also recommended to help increase sexual stamina, and is mentioned in the Kama Sutra, the ancient Indian book on love and sexual expertise.

It is well known that it provides support during cold season. Modern uses for the Tulsi leaves and flowers include drinking them as a tea to counteract negative environmental effects on the body and to rid the system of toxins.

Scientific research offers remarkable evidence that this amazing herb relieves stress, reduces inflammation, lowers cholesterol, eliminates toxins, protects against radiation.

According to Dr Ralph Miller, former Director of Research for the Canadian Dept. of Health and Welfare, 'Tulsi' is effective in supporting the

heart, blood vessels, lowering cholesterol level. It is also good for liver and lungs and also regulates blood pressure and blood sugar. This is a natural immunomodulator that strengthens immunity and enhances stamina. It also prevents gastric ulcers, lowers fevers and improves digestion.

The unique chemistry of Tulsi is not simple. This herb contains hundreds of beneficial compounds known as phytochemicals. The essential oils in its leaves contribute to the refreshing flavor of Tulsi Tea and are a rich source of valuable phytochemicals. Drinking Tulsi in tea form promotes a sense of well being — also known as stress reliever and provides relief from cold to flu symptoms. It is also good for soothing digestive issues and enhancing weight loss.

Tulsi's overall health promotion and disease prevention effects are powerful, but sometimes may be silent. Interestingly, Tulsi's action varies from person to person — depending on what his/her body needs. Some of Tulsi effects are quite immediate, while others develop gradually after weeks of regular use. As well, types of Tulsi can differ, due to their natural habitat due to climate and moisture variations, as well as acid or alkaline content of the soil.



Early soy diet may protect against breast cancer

Asian-American women who ate a lot of soy as children had a 58 percent reduced risk of developing breast cancer, U.S. researchers said recently in a finding that suggests soy may have a protective effect.

"Childhood soy intake was significantly associated with reduced breast cancer risk in our study," said Dr Larissa Korde of the National Cancer Institute, whose study appears in the journal Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention.

Historically, breast cancer rates among white women in the United States are four to seven times higher than in women in China or Japan, Regina Ziegler of the National Cancer Institute said in a statement.

But when Asian women emigrate to the United States, their risk for breast cancer rises over several generations, suggesting something other than genetics was at play. Korde and colleagues checked to see if diet or other lifestyle factors could explain the differences.

They found that women who consumed the highest amounts of soy in childhood had 58 percent less risk of breast cancer compared with those in the lowest groups.

The effect was weaker when adolescents or adults ate or drank a lot of soy, but the study still found a 20 to 25 percent reduction in risk.

The relationship between childhood soy consumption and reduced cancer risk held for all women in the study, regardless of family history of breast cancer.

The findings about childhood soy consumption suggest "the timing of soy intake may be especially critical," Korde said.

She said exactly why soy may protect is not known, but early soy consumption may interfere with the biology of breast cancer. Soy contains isoflavones with properties similar to the female sex hormone estrogen, which may alter breast tissue, she said in a statement.

Tests in animals show soy may help breast tissue mature earlier and better resist cancer-causing agents, she said.

But Ziegler said it is too early for parents to start adding soy to their daughters' diets.

"This is the first study to evaluate childhood soy intake and subsequent breast cancer risk, and this one result is not enough for a public health recommendation," she said, adding that the findings need to be replicated in other studies.

Breast cancer is diagnosed in 1.2 million men and women globally every year and kills 500,000.

Source: Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention

Study finds belly fat makes breathing harder

Carrying excess weight around the middle can impair lung function, adding to a long list of health problems associated with belly fat, French researchers said recently.

Abdominal obesity is already linked with diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease as part of a cluster of health problems known collectively as metabolic syndrome.

Researchers have now shown that a large waist measurement is strongly associated with decreased lung function, regardless of other complicating factors that affect the lungs such as overall obesity and smoking.

The researchers analysed health information about 120,000 people in France, assessing demographic background, smoking history, alcohol consumption, as well as lung function with



respect to a measure of obesity known as body mass index, waist circumference and other measures of metabolic health.

"We found a positive independent relationship between lung function impairment and metabolic syndrome due mainly to abdominal obesity," Dr Natalie Leone of the French National Institute for Health

and Medical Research wrote in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine.

The researchers defined abdominal obesity as having a waist circumference of greater than 35 inches for women and 40 inches for men.

Several large studies have linked poor lung function with higher rates of deaths and hospitalisation from

heart disease, the researchers said.

While it was not clear from the study, the researchers think belly fat may impair the way the diaphragm and chest function. Fat tissue is also known to increase inflammation in the body, which may be playing a role, they said.

Although the reasons may not be clear, Dr. Paul Enright of the University of Arizona said in a commentary there is now enough evidence to include waist measurements as part of routine assessments of lung function.

"Abdominal obesity could then be highlighted on the printed report so that the physician interpreting the report could take the effect of obesity into account," Enright wrote.

Source: American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine

Quest for quality health service

DR ENAMUL HASIB

Three imperative prerequisites for health care management are access, cost and quality. Among these, the quality is the most crucial. If the quality is not up to the mark, patients do not accept it. They will never seek the service no matter how accessible and cost effective it is.

But in a country like Bangladesh people do not have many options. Most of them cannot access private services because cost comes into play. They have to depend on health care service rendered by the government even if the quality of service is not satisfactory. That is why quality issue in public hospitals is very important.

On the other hand, patients who have money are paying more for public and private services, but most of the time, they do not experience any improvement in service quality. Patients have the tendency to compare the services with that of those countries that have ensured higher quality in health service.

Improving the quality of health care is becoming a concern for patients, government, managers and professionals working in our country. Quality management increases the health status of individuals and the population and thus brings in social

and economic benefits.

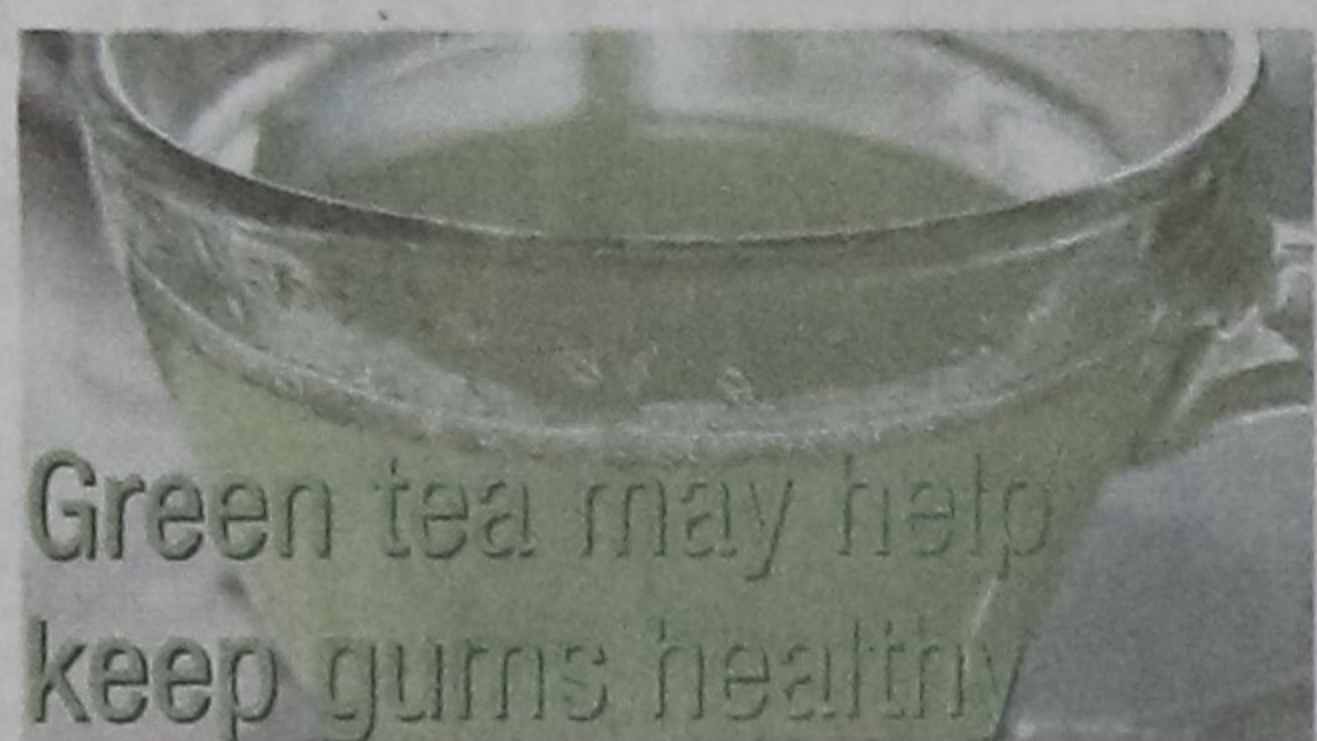
Four key areas need to be secured in order to ensure quality management in the operational level of health care service.

1. Ensuring adequate number of managers at all levels of the health system
2. Ensuring appropriate competencies of managers
3. Creating better support systems
4. Creating an enabling working environment

These four conditions are closely inter-related. Strengthening one without the others is not likely to work. Although there are increasing pressures to improve quality, many challenges are there as well. But it is essential for the Government and Non-Government stakeholders to realise the essence of new dimensions of quality management which markedly different and undoubtedly superior than traditional approach of quality assurance.

Recently, James P Grant School of Public Health at BRAC University conducted a short course on Quality Management in Health Systems. The course was attended by 17 health service managers about half of whom were Government employees.

The writer is a Research Associate at James P. Grant School of Public Health of BRAC University.



Green tea may help keep gums healthy

A cup of green tea per day may help keep gum disease at bay, a new study suggests.

Researchers found that among middle-aged Japanese, the odds of having gum disease declined as the men's intake of green tea rose.

For each daily cup they drank, the risk of having signs of gum disease — including receding, easily bleeding gums — inched downward, the researchers report in the Journal of Periodontology.

The findings do not mean, however, that green tea is a substitute for seeing the dentist. The relationship between green tea and lower odds of gum disease was fairly weak, Dr Yoshihiro Shimazaki, one of the researchers on the study, told.

Good overall oral care, Shimazaki said, is what's most important.

For the study, Shimazaki and his colleagues at Kyushu University in Fukuoka, Japan, examined 940 men between the ages of 49 and

59 for signs of gum disease. The men also completed a questionnaire on smoking and drinking habits, tooth-brushing habits and green tea intake.

In general, the study found, the odds of gum disease declined as green tea intake climbed, even with the other lifestyle factors considered. The researchers did, however, lack information on the men's overall diet, and past studies have suggested that certain foods and nutrients — like whole grains, fiber and vitamin C — may protect against gum disease.

If green tea itself does combat gum disease, it may be because of its concentration of antioxidant compounds called polyphenols, according to Shimazaki.

Gum disease arises from bacterial infection, and lab research suggests that green tea polyphenols can inhibit those germs and the damage they cause.

Source: Journal of Periodontology

Too little sleep may raise diabetes risk

REUTERS, Chicago

People who get fewer than six hours of sleep at night are prone to abnormal blood sugar levels, possibly putting them at risk for diabetes, U.S. researchers said recently.

They said people in a study who slept less than six hours were 4.5 times more likely to develop abnormal blood sugar readings in six years compared with those who slept longer.

"This study supports growing evidence of the association of inadequate sleep with adverse health issues," said Lisa Rafelson of the University at Buffalo in New York, who presented her findings at the Conference on Cardiovascular Disease Epidemiology and Prevention in Palm Harbor, Florida.

Several studies have shown negative health consequences related to getting too little sleep. In children, studies showed it raises the risk of obesity, depression and high blood pressure. In older adults, it increases the risk of falls. And in the middle aged, it raises the risk of infections, heart disease, stroke and cancer.

Adults typically need between seven and nine hours of nightly sleep, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Rafelson and colleagues wanted to see if lack of sleep might be raising the risk for type 2 diabetes, the kind that is being driven by rising rates of obesity and sedentary lifestyles. It develops when the body makes too much insulin and does not efficiently use the insulin it makes, a condition known as insulin resistance.

Using data from a large, six-year study, they identified 91 people whose blood sugar rose during the study period and compared them to 273 people whose glucose levels remained in the normal range.

They found the short sleepers were far more likely to develop impaired fasting glucose — a condition that can lead to type 2 diabetes — during the study period than those who slept six to eight hours.

That difference held even after adjusting for age, obesity, heart rate, high blood pressure, family history of diabetes and symptoms of depression.

Childhood blindness researcher awarded

Ophthalmological Society of Bangladesh (OSB) has recognised Dr M A Muhiit as the pioneer in research on the field of childhood blindness and awarded him with gold medal, says a press release.

Dr Muhiit, an eminent Bangladeshi ophthalmologist currently working as the clinical research fellow at the University of London's International Centre for Eye Health was bestowed with the award in the 36th annual national conference of OSB recently.

Dr Muhiit is the lead researcher who has conducted the first national study on childhood blindness in our country. His study revealed that over 40,000 children are blind in Bangladesh and among them, over two-third are blind from potentially preventable and treatable causes.

He has established Child Sight Foundation (CSF) to restore the eye sight of children who are blind due to



Dr M A Muhiit

preventable or treatable causes like cataract. Now this organisation has been detecting blind children and referring cataract blind for operation at free of cost.

He was previously awarded the Distinguished Service Award by Asia Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology for his leadership role in the development of research, programmes and policies for prevention of blindness in children — both in Bangladesh and at international level to ensure the rights of the blind children.