

# Good health adds life to years

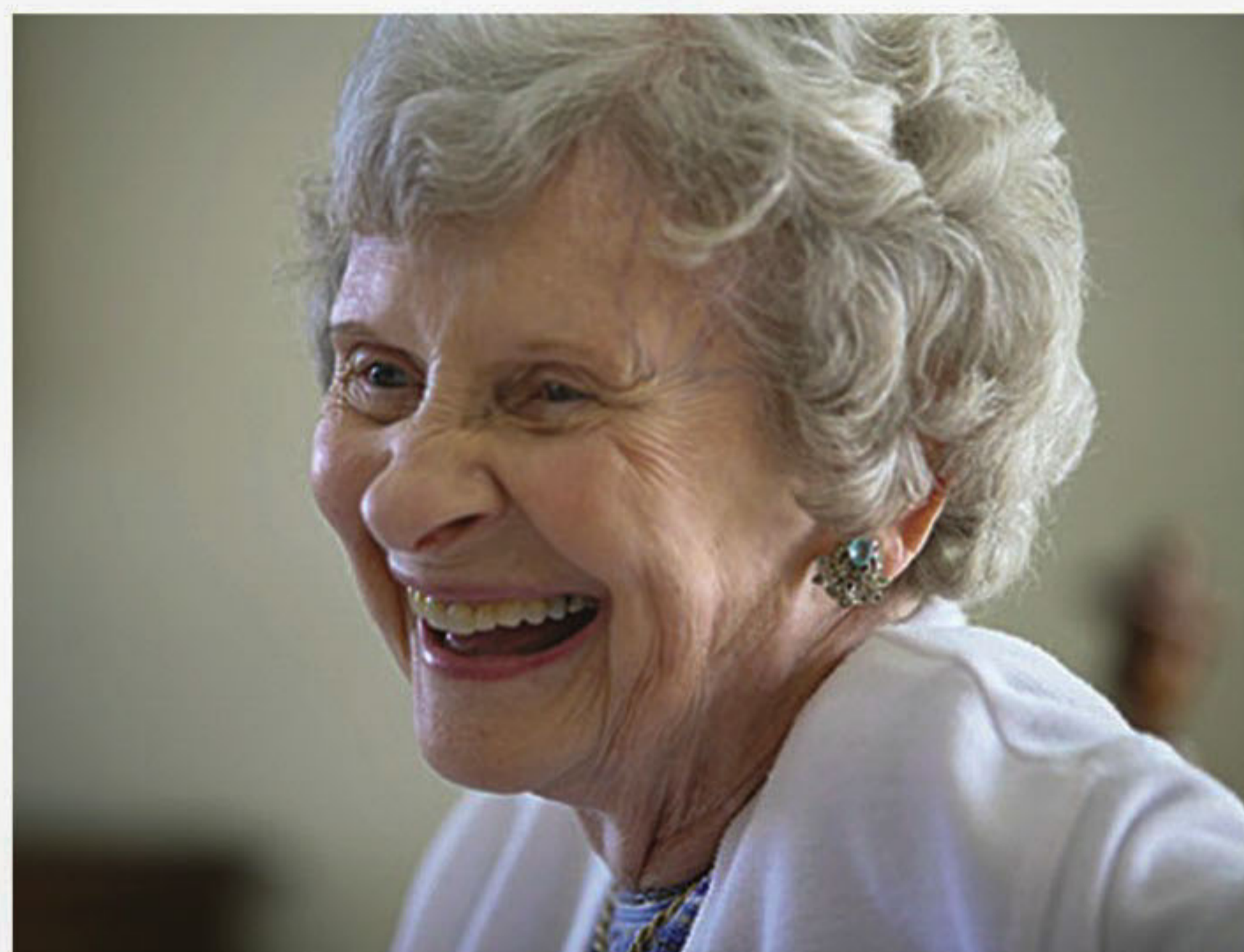
DR SAMLEE PLIANBANGCHANG

Ageing is a natural and inevitable process. For the past century, mankind has been adding years to life. More people now survive the challenges of childbirth and childhood to reach old age. This trend is not restricted to the resource-rich countries, but has become a global phenomenon including the countries of South-East Asia.

It has been estimated that around 142 million people or 8 percent of the population of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) South-East Asia Region are above the age of 60 years. This number will continue to increase. There is an urgent need to focus attention on the ageing population because of the increasing share of elderly persons in the total population.

Longer life is associated with chronic diseases and disabilities in old age. This affects the overall quality of life and poses a challenge for the families, communities and national governments. With nuclear families replacing the joint families and with large rural to urban migrations, often the old and the infirm are left at home. These changing patterns of society are now affecting the age-old balance of care of the old and very old persons at home.

On World Health Day, which is being observed today, WHO is highlighting



Healthy ageing requires a significant paradigm shift in the way care is provided to the elderly population.

ageing as a rapidly emerging priority that most countries have yet to realise and address adequately. The slogan of the day is — *Good health adds life to years.*

Improving health in the cycle of ageing will require saving lives, protecting health and removing disability and pain.

This can be achieved through a combination of healthy lifestyle throughout the life-course, age-friendly environment and improved detection and prevention of disease which also includes appropriate research. Creating age-friendly environments and policies to engage the

elderly population and utilising their vast potentials will result in dignified ageing, allowing elderly population to participate actively in family, community and political life, irrespective of their functional ability.

Healthy ageing requires a significant paradigm shift in the way care is provided to the elderly population. Age-friendly primary health care minimises the consequences of non-communicable or chronic diseases through early detection, prevention and quality of care, and provide long-term palliative care for those with advanced disease. Such interventions would need to be supplemented by affordable long-term care for those who can no longer retain their independence.

Building an age-friendly society requires actions in a variety of sectors other than health and include education, employment, labour, finance, social security, transportation, justice, housing and rural-urban development. This will involve policy-makers at the national governments, cities and municipalities; civil society groups and senior citizens forum; academic and research institutions; private sector enterprises; community leaders and youth groups.

The writer is Regional Director for South-East Asia Region of WHO.

## INNOVATION

### An innovation in the fight against anaemia



A simple, low-cost and non-invasive test through a device could help in the fight against anaemia.

STAR HEALTH DESK

Being inspired from doctor friends working in rural area, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) graduate Myshkin Ingawale has come up with a solution that would be easy for healthcare workers — often untrained — to use in the field to measure Hb level and degree of anaemia.

The device — a pulse oximeter known as TouchHb — is a non-invasive method of monitoring the oxygenation of Hb using light without the prick of a needle. The patient is attached to the machine via a finger clip.

Anaemia is the reduction of haemoglobin (Hb), an oxygen carrying molecule of blood. More than half the anaemia cases can easily be cured with a course of free iron pills, but if left untreated it is potentially fatal, especially for pregnant women.

A similarly non-invasive device was perfect because healthcare workers in rural area are often not trained to conduct blood tests using needles and lack the equipment to assess the results of such tests.

With this simple test, available in the community, there is much greater likelihood of spotting and subsequently treating anaemia specially crucial for pregnant women who need frequent test to measure Hb.

Source: BBC

## HEALTH bulletin

### Common antibiotics tied to eye emergencies: study

A common class of antibiotics known as Fluoroquinolones, which include Ciprofloxacin and Levofloxacin, were linked to a higher risk of so-called retinal detachment — when the light-sensitive tissue in the eye separates from gel that fills the eyeball, according to a new Canadian study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. People treated by ophthalmologists for the emergency condition were five times more likely to be taking these drugs, than those who did not have retinal detachment. Researchers said that these drugs are toxic to connective tissue and cartilage causing damage of these tissues in eyes resulting in retinal detachment.



Middle-aged women who are overweight or obese run a higher risk of potentially dangerous blood clots, especially after surgery, a large new study published in Circulation finds. The research, which followed more than 1 million UK women, confirms a link between obesity and the risk of venous thromboembolism (VTE) — blood clots in the veins, usually in the legs. If one of those clots breaks free and travels to the lungs which can prove fatal. The findings also show that heavier women are more likely to end up needing surgery.

## A key element of managing intellectual disability

MD ANISUZZAMAN

Intellectual disability limits a person's ability to learn at an expected level and function in daily life. Levels of intellectual disability vary from a very slight to a very severe problem. Children with intellectual disability might take longer time to learn to speak, walk, dress or eat without help and they may have trouble learning in school. However, early detection and intervention is crucial to reduce helplessness of persons with intellectual disabilities in their later age.

Intellectual disability starts any time before a child turns 18 years old — even before birth. It can be caused by injury, disease or a problem in the brain. For many children, the cause of their intellectual disability is not known. There is no alternative to early identification and intervention to provide them with higher quality of life.

There is lack of number of people skilled with identifying and handling persons with intellectual disability. Large public and private hospitals could provide required assessment for intellectual disability if there were adequate trained professionals. The important thing people should remember that these



persons are not mentally ill. However, some intellectually disabled persons might have mental disorders like others.

Currently 10 public medical college hospitals in Bangladesh are operating child development centres under the department of paediatrics of the respective medical college. Shishu Bikash Kendra of the Dhaka Shishu Hospital took initiative to introduce this unit in the medical college hospitals. Parents may consult with the professionals of those centres.

Service providers from NGO sectors including SWID Bangladesh, BPF, CRP, CDD, Samajvittik Medical College Hospital, Gonoshasthya Nagar hospital etc. need to strengthen facilities for

early identification of persons with intellectual disabilities through their service networks.

Professional and clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and other relevant professionals may contribute to building the human resource capacity of existing health care facilities all over the country.

Positive attitude, commitment and coordination among different professionals, departments, institutes and ministries; as well as necessary policy guideline from the government are needed to ensure facilities related to early identification and intervention for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

The writer is the Country Manager, Leonard Cheshire Disability Bangladesh. E-mail: azaman71@yahoo.com

## A disaster risk reduction initiative

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Volunteers for Bangladesh, a sister concern of Jaago Foundation recently organised a training of the trainers (ToT) on first response immediately after an emergency at The American Centre, Dhaka in association with Operation Smile from the USA. The ToT included CPR, first aid and other life-saving skills. Korvi Rakshand, founder of Jaago Foundation said, "It is intended to train the volunteers to extend immediate support after an injury/accident."



## Instant FiberLife

Instant fiber drink for healthy life



- 100% refined natural fiber
- Antioxidant enriched fiber drink powder
- Orange flavored
- Sugar free
- Preservative free

Natural Fiber + Vitamin C + Beta Carotene  
**3 in 1**

ORION  
Natural Care Ltd.  
Dhaka, Bangladesh  
... caring naturally