

Healthcare inequality between countries has grown globally

STAR HEALTH DESK

Despite global improvements in healthcare quality and access over 25 years, inequalities between the best and worst-performing countries have grown. Even among countries of similar development levels, there is wide variation in healthcare access and quality, exposing untapped potential for improving healthcare in these regions, according to a Global Burden of Disease study published in The Lancet.

The study develops a novel index which measures the quality and accessibility of healthcare. The rating (scored 0-100) is based on death rates from 32 diseases that could be avoided by effective medical care in the country year-on-year. The new study assesses performance for 195 countries from 1990-2015, providing crucial data to help monitor progress on universal health coverage and identify local priorities for improving healthcare.

Globally, the index increased from 40.7 in 1990 to 53.7 in 2015 and 167 countries saw healthcare access and quality significantly improve. However, over the same timeframe, the divide between the best and worst-performing countries grew by almost 5 points – ranging



from 23.1 to 84.7 (a 61.6 point gap) in 1990 and from 28.6 to 94.6 (66.0 point gap) in 2015. Overall in 2015, western European countries generally scored highest, while those in sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania mainly scored lowest. But not all countries in the same region performed similarly. The paper also breaks down each country's performance according to each of the 32 diseases studied.

Looking at the top performers, Andorra maintained its top ranking from 1990 and with a rating of 94.6 out of 100 in 2015. Other than Switzerland the rest of the top 5 performers were Nordic countries. Between 1990 and 2015, South Korea, Turkey, Peru, China and the Maldives recorded some of the largest improvements (increasing by 24.1, 24.9, 23.7, 24.7 and 29.6 since 1990, respectively), showing that more rapid

advances are possible than seen overall. Potential drivers of this may include the financial arrangements of the healthcare system, provider ownership and its governance. The study is also the first of its kind to use sociodemographic data to analyse how healthcare improved in line with economic development in each country. The researchers compared each country's healthcare quality and

access performance rating with the rating it would be expected to have, based on its level of economic development. This gap helps illustrate the extent to which a country's healthcare system could be improved, and compare countries at similar levels of development.

There was huge variation for countries of similar development levels. Importantly, for 62 countries the gap between their actual and expected rating widened, particularly in southern sub-Saharan African countries (Lesotho, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe), Iraq, Pakistan and Honduras. Meanwhile, several countries performed very well considering their levels of development, such as in eastern and western sub-Saharan Africa (Burundi, Comoros and Rwanda), Turkey, Peru and South Korea.

In future, the authors plan to extend the analysis to include public health intervention impact, subnational health inequalities and health financing measures, as well as including an increased number of avoidable causes of death to account for recent medical advances (such as antiretroviral therapy for HIV) and causes with lower death rates.

DIGITAL SYSTEM

Pharmadex Launched in Bangladesh

STAR HEALTH REPORT

The Honourable Minister Mohammed Nasim, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), officially launched Pharmadex in Bangladesh recently.

Pharmadex (<http://pharmadexbd.org/>) is a web-based integrated information system that facilitates the submission, review, and evaluation of medicine registration applications and dossiers on the basis of international standards and formats.

The USAID-funded Systems for Improved Access to Pharmaceuticals and Services (SIAPS) Programme partnered with the DGDA to improve the efficiency of the country's medicine registration process. DGDA, with SIAPS technical assistance, adapted Pharmadex to meet the context of Bangladesh to move toward a more efficient and transparent medicine registration system from the current paper-based process.

The President of the Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (BAPI), Nazmul Hassan, MP, also recognised that a system like Pharmadex, aligned with CTD, is needed for the country. He stressed that pharmaceutical companies would need more training at the initial stage to submit applications online.

Miranda Beckman, Deputy Director, Office of Population, Health, Nutrition, and Education, USAID, mentioned that USAID will work shoulder to shoulder to assist DGDA strengthen its capacity on critical regulatory systems and ensure that sustainable health systems exist in Bangladesh.

Commending DGDA for taking such a momentous step, SIAPS Bangladesh Country Project Director Zahedul Islam hoped that by using Pharmadex, the DGDA will be able to perform their regulatory functions more efficiently and effectively.

HEALTH bulletin

Forgetting little things in old age

DR SYED FAHEEM SHAMS

We all will grow old one day. Numbers of older people are increasing day by day throughout the world. As the age progresses, we forget things. We make mistakes now and then. Our partner or children get angry time to time, we get irritated and frustrated trying hard to memorise everything. So, is it normal? Are we going to end up like we do not know anything and cannot recognise anyone?

As we grow old, our brain volume also decreases in size. So the memory areas in brain can shrink and we may forget few things which we used to remember quite well before. It can be normal as long as we are functioning well or can perform our regular activities as before. But this forgetfulness can become very bad and it may be a great strain for the family members. We call it dementia.

The most common symptom is forgetfulness. It can start slowly or

can be very prominent from the beginning. There are many causes of dementia such as it can happen due to brain stroke or can be slowly progressive Alzheimer's disease. At first, one may have trouble remembering small things, like what they did yesterday. They may get lost or confused easily. Eventually, they may forget how to do everyday things like cooking meals, getting dressed or using the toilet. They may not recognise even close family members. It may have an effect on mood. We can become agitated or moody, pace about, or wander off. They may have trouble talking or understanding you. Some people imagine that things are happening to them (false beliefs known as delusions) or see things that are not really there (visual hallucinations).

It is very unfortunate that still there is no cure for it. There are medicines that can help a little with forgetfulness and behavioural problems. These are the drugs that can

halt the progression of memory deterioration. But they may not work for everyone. Drug treatments are a part of the care that people with dementia and their families need. People with dementia will eventually need a lot of help looking after themselves. It is very difficult to see someone you love changing gradually after living so many years all together. So beside the medicines we need to take few measures such as:

- We can try putting labels on things, or making sure things are always put away in the same place.
 - If they are saying something wrong or have delusions or hallucinations, there is no point in trying to persuade them that the things they are telling are wrong or not real. It is better to gently distract or reassure them than arguing.
 - Doing day to day activities can help a lot along with watching TVs and reading newspapers.
 - Working with old memories such as photographs, instruments, story books or movies can help.
 - People with dementia feel very uncomfortable when their surrounding environment and people are unfamiliar. So it is better to maintain a familial environment.
- There are so many things that we can do to help people suffering from dementia and at the same time we need to take care of ourselves as we may become fatigued by taking care of them continuously.

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Apollo Hospital Dhaka joins Doctorola.com

Doctorola.com recently signed an agreement with Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, says a press release. The agreement will allow people in Bangladesh to find and book appointments of the doctors of Apollo Hospitals Dhaka through doctorola.com. A few other collaborative services and health awareness campaigns were also included in the agreement to bring more value for the patients of Apollo and Doctorola.

Natural sweetener launched in Bangladesh

In recent times, synthetic and various types of artificial sweeteners (e.g. saccharin, aspartame, and sucralose) became widely used as sugar substitute. But little we know that synthetic sugar can be carcinogenic for humans and unsafe for human consumption. In an effort to minimise regular consumption, synthetic and various types of artificial sweeteners Purnava limited has brought 'CHINI GO' which is made from the sweetest extract of stevia leaf for the health conscious consumers of Bangladesh. Consumption of sugar substitute 'CHINI GO' will considerably reduce the impact of many diseases in the years to come.



Streptokinase injection to be provided free of cost to patients in NICVD

Streptokinase is an enzyme which works to break up and dissolve blood clots which can block arteries. It is mostly used in the treatment of heart attack or lung blood clots (pulmonary embolism). The sooner Streptokinase is administered to a patient, who went through a heart attack through intravenous injection, the lesser damage will be caused to the muscles of the heart. Patients with heart attack coming to receive treatment in National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD) previously had to buy this expensive injection which may cost approximately BDT 5000-6000 from pharmacies which used to delay the process of the treatment. NICVD will now provide the life saving medication completely free of cost to its patients.

Prof Dr Afzalur Rahman, Director of NICVD said that in case of emergency situations the upper and middle class people could afford the expensive injection but it gets tough for the patients who cannot afford buying it. The decision to provide the injection free of cost is mainly for the patients who could not afford buying it.



Chikungunya is a viral disease transmitted to humans by infected mosquitoes. It causes fever and severe joint pain. Other symptoms include muscle pain, headache, nausea, fatigue and rash.

Symptoms

- Most people infected with chikungunya virus will develop some symptoms.
- Symptoms usually begin 3-7 days after being bitten by an infected mosquito.
- The most common symptoms are fever & joint pain.
- Other symptoms may include headache, muscle pain, joint swelling, or rash.
- Chikungunya disease does not often result in death, but the symptoms can be severe and disabling.
- Most patients feel better within a week. In some people, the joint pain may persist for months.
- People at risk for more severe disease include newborns infected around the time of birth, older adults (≥65 years), and people with medical conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart disease.
- Once a person has been infected, he or she is likely to be protected from future infections.

Treatment

There is no vaccine to prevent or medicine to treat chikungunya virus. Treat the symptoms:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Take medicine such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or paracetamol to reduce fever & pain.
- Do not take aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) until dengue can be ruled out to reduce the risk of bleeding.
- If you are taking medicine for another medical condition, talk to your healthcare provider before taking additional medication.

If you have chikungunya, prevent mosquito bites for the first week of your illness.

- During the first week of infection, chikungunya virus can be found in the blood & passed from an infected person to a mosquito through mosquito bites.
- An infected mosquito can then spread the virus to other people.

