



People living longer, but sickness increasing worldwide

Diseases that don't kill but cause a lot of disability increase globally

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People globally are living longer but chronic diseases and conditions like high blood pressure are becoming more prevalent, according to a massive new global report.

Thursday's publication of the Global Burden of Disease Study 2010 involved 486 authors in 50 countries who aimed to offer a comprehensive update on diseases and injuries since the last such report in 1990.

"There's a series of diseases that don't kill you very often but cause an awful lot of disability," Christopher Murray, director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, where the report was co-ordinated.

"What ails you isn't necessarily what kills you," he told a news conference in London.

The disabling diseases include mental illnesses, substance abuse, musculoskeletal injuries like back and neck pain, loss of vision and hearing and anemias, he added.

Overall, heart disease continues to be the top cause of death worldwide, followed by stroke. Together they accounted for around one in four deaths worldwide in 2010, nearly 13 million.

In 1990, ischemic heart disease was ranked fourth, behind lower respiratory infections, diarrhea, and pre-term birth complications.

Diseases such as diabetes, lung cancer, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease moved up the list while diarrhea, lower respiratory infections, and tuberculosis moved down.

High blood pressure and smoking are now the largest risk factors for poor health. In contrast, malnutrition, the number 1 burden in the world in 1990, has dropped to number 8, Murray said.

The trends show a shift worldwide. The exception is Sub-Saharan Africa, which continues to have a high rate of death from AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis despite progress in expanding access to HIV medications and bed nets to prevent malaria that are credited with increases in life expectancy in the region.

But there are also large regional differences. Violence kills many young men in Latin America, suicide was the ninth top cause of death in women in Asia, and diabetes is now a bigger killer among those aged 15 to 49 in Africa than in Western Europe.

The researchers are planning to release country-specific reports starting in March 2013.

The report, published in three issues of the medical journal Lancet, includes a series of interactive tools to help visualize the data.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation paid for most of the research.

With files from The Associated Press