

Addressing cardiovascular and metabolic diseases in Africa – A report on the 1st all Africa multidisciplinary conference on heart disease, diabetes and stroke

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Tagged "All Africa, All Heart," the 1st All Africa Conference of the Pan African Society of Cardiology (PASCAR) held in Nairobi, Kenya from May 13-16, 2007 was truly an historic event. It was the first continent-wide and multidisciplinary conference on heart disease, stroke and diabetes and it brought together researchers, clinicians and specialists from all parts of Africa and the world. The conference, organized by the newly-reconstituted Pan African Society of Cardiology, in collaboration with the Kenya Cardiac Society, was a timely and necessary response to the emerging epidemic of cardiovascular and metabolic disease in Africa. It was very well attended, with over 300 delegates and 80 scientific abstracts, hosted in the beautiful city of Nairobi for the conference proceedings.

The main scientific programme was preceded by several satellite sessions and workshops held at the start of the meeting. These included the 2nd International Forum for Hypertension Control and Prevention in Africa (IFHA) and a joint PASCAR/World Heart Federation Workshop on the Control of Rheumatic Heart Disease in Africa. The three-day main scientific programme consisted of seven scientific sessions on Hypertension, Cardiac Surgery, Prevention and Management of Rheumatic Valvular Heart Disease and Cardiac Infections, Paediatric Cardiology, Heart Failure, Diabetes and Stroke. There were presentations from renowned experts in each field, followed by "Meet the Expert Panels" which allowed participants the chance to interact with the experts in detailed question and answer sessions. The international panel of experts included Philip Boenhoffer (UK), Robert Fagard

(Belgium), Tom Gaziano (USA), George Mensah (USA), Lionel Opie (South Africa), Yackoub Seedat (South Africa), Willem Remme (Netherlands), James Wilkinson (Australia), and Salim Yusuf (Canada) amongst many others.

In his opening address at the start of the scientific sessions, Dr George Mensah of the Centers for Disease Control in the United States set the stage for the meeting by outlining the challenges posed by the increasing burden of cardiovascular disease (CVD) on the continent and suggesting various strategies focusing on prevention and treatment. The first session on hypertension and its management in Africa highlighted the pathophysiology of hypertension in African populations, addressing the science of hypertension management in the context of cost-effectiveness of various interventions, including the possibility of introducing a "poly-pill." This was followed by a session on cardiac surgery, detailing the needs and distribution of cardiac surgical services in Africa. Panelists shared surgical experiences from the Sudan, Kenya and South Africa and commented on some of the challenges and innovations in providing these services with limited personnel, equipment and funding. The 1st PASCAR Guest Lecture, given by Professor Salim Yusuf of Canada, challenged participants to explore various strategies for the prevention of CVD in Africa, stressing the importance of Pan African and international research collaborations in solving locally relevant problems.

The welcome address scheduled to be delivered by His Excellency, Mr Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya, was unfortunately cancelled, to enable the President to attend a national memorial for the victims of a Kenyan Airways plane crash. However, the scientific programme continued with the presentations on rheumatic heart disease (RHD) and the continued burden of RHD in several parts of the continent. Panel discussions focused on the management and control of valvular diseases in Africa, stressing the importance of epidemiological surveys of prevalence and the implementation of prevention programmes. Treatment of children with heart disease in

Africa was the focus of the sessions on paediatric heart diseases. The third day of the scientific discussions opened with a keynote address on combating the epidemic of heart failure in the world, given by Professor Willem Remme, president of the World Heart Failure Society. In the following sessions on heart failure, the preliminary results from the Soweto Heart Study were shared by Professor Karen Silwa of South Africa, providing important insight on the etiologies of heart failure in an African population. The scientific programme was then concluded with a joint session on the management of stroke and diabetes in Africa, addressing the research and clinical implications of the increasing burden of metabolic and cerebrovascular diseases in Africa.

In the research sphere, the poster sessions and oral presentations were very robust, featuring over 80 scientific abstracts from researchers all over the continent, accepted as oral or poster presentations. The poster session research prize was presented to Professor Longo-Mbenza from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for his long-standing and prolific research on cardiovascular disease in the DRC. The oral presentation prize went to Dr Ana Olga Mocumbi of Mozambique for her interesting and novel insights on the pathophysiology and management of endomyocardial fibrosis in Mozambique. There were also exhibition stands from various vendors to provide information on available products and services for cardiovascular disease, diagnosis, management and research in Africa. Other highlights of the meeting included the launching of the Cardiovascular Journal of Africa (CVJA) formerly known as the Cardiovascular Journal of South Africa but now to be managed under the auspices of PASCAR to provide an important avenue for the publication of high quality cardiovascular research from Africa. Scientific abstracts and posters that were presented at the meeting were published in the inaugural edition of CVJA.

In addition to the comprehensive scientific and research sessions, conference participants also enjoyed the social programme with a Gala Dinner at the world-renowned Carnivore restaurant in Nairobi,

accompanied by entertainment graciously coordinated by the host Kenyan Cardiac Society. The meeting ended with the PASCAR General Assembly, with representatives from the national societies of cardiology and cardiac surgery in Africa meeting to discuss the by-laws and constitution. The organization, which was recently revived after an eleven-year hiatus, includes members from national professional societies in Benin, Cameroon, Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. The general consensus at the conclusion of the meeting was that the scientific sessions were excellent and well organized, thanks to the tireless efforts of the conveners and organizers of the meeting.

Several important themes were highlighted in the meeting. The first of these was a commitment to the delivery of appropriate cardiovascular care in Africa in the context of marked limitations in the availability of resources. Another important theme was the need for co-operation and collaboration amongst different groups to foster effective research and the information sharing between groups in different parts of the continent. Finally, several speakers and discussions focused on the need to develop and maintain a focus on prevention of cardiovascular diseases in Africa, through education, advocacy, effective collaboration with governments, and cooperative research. Although the scope of cardiovascular research and clinical work occurring in Africa as highlighted during the meeting is encouraging, there are still significant challenges to be addressed in the cost-effective prevention and treatment of heart disease, diabetes and stroke in Africa.

In all, this meeting and indeed, the rebirth of PASCAR and its scientific journal, the Cardiovascular Journal of Africa, heralds a new era in cardiovascular health prevention, clinical care and research in Africa. An era in which co-operation across the continent and a renewed focus on the primordial prevention of cardiovascular diseases, high quality research and comprehensive clinical care will change the picture of cardiovascular disease on the continent.