Magdy Abelhamid – President, Egyptian Society of Cardiology



Smoking is a disaster in the country since many Egyptians start smoking from a very young age

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Dr Magdy Abdelhamid, president of the Egyptian Society of Cardiology, explains the main trends in cardiology in Egypt and the society's prevention projects. He also gives insights into the latest technological programs being implemented in the country to ensure patient safety.

The World Health Organization indicates that Cardiovascular diseases account for 46 percent of total deaths in Egypt. What are the main trends of cardiology in the country?

Heart attacks are common in our country – even among the younger population since there is a very high percentage of smokers. We presented some data on Egypt in the European Cardiology Society Conference in Munich last year. The data is very alarming, as we found a higher than average percentage of people that smoke, have diabetes or obesity. Another interesting factor that we found in our data is the high percentage of coronary heart disease among young patients.

Heart failure which is an epidemic disease worldwide is another trend that we see in Egypt. Many cardiovascular diseases lead to heart failure. This disease is characterized by recurrent hospitalization and increase mortality and recurrent hospitalization represent an economic burden. The progress of treatment for heart failure has been changing over the last few years. We now

have drugs that improve survival and decrease hospitalization.

What are the main challenges cardiovascular disease patients are currently facing in Egypt?

The challenges can start in early diagnosis since some investigations can be expensive. We have patients that are sponsored by their company and others that pay out-of-pocket. Patients, who do not have the means to cover out-of-pocket costs, can go to government hospitals. Additionally, the cost of drugs is the main challenge for many patients. In cardiovascular medicine, there have been advances in treatment and there are new drugs available, but they are very expensive.

The government is making efforts to have all the drugs needed for cardiovascular diseases available at government hospitals. This initiative is very expensive and requires the proper financial support from all the participating parties. It has to be considered that having these drugs available would actually be very cost-effective since they decrease re-hospitalization and save an economic burden in the long run.

A report by the European Cardiology Society establishes that tobacco consumption is a major risk factor for adults aged 15-59 years in Egypt. What steps are being taken to better educate Egyptian society in the harms of tobacco consumption?

Smoking is a disaster in the country since many Egyptians start smoking from a very young age. Nowadays, there are advertisements and TV shows that show people smoking, which is a terrible example for our young people. There needs to be more campaigns alerting and educating people on the harms of smoking. Smoking indoors should be forbidden. Hence, we are working with companies offering products that help people to stop smoking. Moreover, we are collaborating with the Ministry of Health to create an awareness campaign about the dangers of smoking.

What are the main priorities of the society to contribute to a better cardiology environment in Egypt?

Raising awareness is the main priority of society right now. As part of our new strategy, which we have been implementing over the last 3 years, we now host many events throughout the year, focusing on the prevention of cardiovascular diseases. In addition, we are focused on educating

and giving the best preparation to our young cardiologist. We are investing in them with research opportunities and grants for them to go study abroad. The goal is to have them trained in other countries, where they can get the expertise needed and come back and share their new learnings with their colleagues.

Moreover, we are providing workshops in different sub-specialties, having experts giving a hands-on experience. At the end of the workshop, we give the participants a certificate of completion. These workshops allow doctors to learn and understand the new concepts in the constantly evolving field of cardiology.

Last year, we started a partnership with the Military Heart Academy, a very prestigious institution in Egypt. This collaboration provides them with a year-long hands-on training, that allows the doctors to receive the best preparation at the military hospitals to obtain practical experience. The doctors that participate are also provided with a certificate to give them the credit of hard working on getting new skills.

What makes you so passionate to work in this field?

To be a doctor was always a dream for me. I became very passionate in the field of Cardiology after having the honour of learning from the best domestic and international doctors while I did a visiting fellowship at Harvard Medical School. Cardiovascular diseases are a big problem in this country, but most of them are preventable.

As a society, we changed the strategy three years ago and decided to focus on prevention, education, research and raising the knowledge level of our young cardiologists, by taking part in many national and international joint sessions, registries and partnerships around the year. This has changed the field of cardiology here in Egypt because it has given a clear goal of reducing cardiovascular diseases all over Egypt, which is the main vision of our society.

Could you please introduce the key activities and responsibilities of the Egyptian Society of Cardiology to our international audience?

The Egyptian Society of Cardiology is one of the oldest in the Middle East, having been established in 1951, and has as a mission for the prevention of cardiovascular diseases. We have a membership of over 3500 cardiologists. Cardiovascular diseases are one of the causes of mortality

all over the world and in our country. According to our data, 47 percent of mortality in Egypt is due to cardiovascular diseases. Fortunately, we can prevent mortality related to cardiovascular diseases by having patient awareness and education workshops for our members. We have 15 working groups focused on every sub-specialty in cardiology, which are in charge of planning the workshops and educational activities.

Additionally, we have an event every year, CardioEgypt, which is a four-day conference. We have over six thousand people participating from all over the country and the world. Furthermore, we have awareness activities throughout the year that provide patients with the tools they need to prevent diseases such as heart failure.

The Society has partnerships with other organizations around the world such as the European Society of Cardiology and American Heart Association, American College of Cardiology with them we have joint sessions at international meetings.

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