

African heart network

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The African Heart Network held its 4th Workshop and Annual General Meeting in Accra, Ghana on 14–15 October 2004.

This year's workshop was a far cry from the 2003 workshop in Cape Town, which involved members from only three countries – Benin, Nigeria and South Africa.

At Accra there were 28 participants from eight countries, with apologies from Benin. This was an eloquent testimony to the success of the No. 1 item in the 2003 Action Plan, which was to increase the Network's membership to at least seven countries (on a continent of 54 countries) within one year. This increase in membership was reflected in the presence of the new members – Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique and Sudan.

The workshop commenced with reports from the member foundations, especially their activities on World Heart Day. Their various strengths and weaknesses were highlighted, with lack of funds and basic infrastructure, e.g., office space, furniture, computers, etc., emerging as recurrent problems in the newly formed foundations.

The need to get the young foundations twinned with older ones, which will help them with training and capacity-building, was recognized. The older foundations may well have to provide some kind of initial funding (seed money) to get the younger ones firmly established and sustain their progress. Prevention of cardiovascular disease in sub-Saharan Africa was the main theme of this year's workshop, which also covered collaboration with other partners in this endeavour. Partners, including the WHO Regional Office for Africa, the World Heart Federation, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the International Society for Hypertension (ISH), were present at the workshop to identify various areas of collaboration in the prevention of cardiovascular disease in Africa.

WHO was represented by its country representative in Ghana, Dr. Melvine George; WHF by its Director of Development, Ms Helen Alderson; CDC by its acting Director for Non-communicable and Chronic Disease Department, Professor George Mensah; and ISH by its board member for Africa, Professor Y.K. Seedat, from South Africa.

The general consensus was that primordial prevention of cardiovascular diseases through health promotion is the only viable option for Africa to avoid the looming epidemic of morbidity and mortality from cardiovascular disease. The economic situation of most countries in Africa cannot support any other approach to the double burden of communicable disease coupled with non-communicable and chronic disease.

Training was also provided on fundraising and media management to help member foundations raise funds more effectively and to use the media in their advocacy efforts.

The older foundations shared experiences of some of their programmes, such as the Heart Foundation of South Africa's Children's Programme and the Nigerian Heart Foundation's Heart Mark Programme, to show what works and what could be done better, drawing on the experience of others.

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Go red for women

The World Heart Federation acknowledges that women's cardiovascular health is an under-recognized aspect of cardiovascular care and prevention worldwide. The CVD and stroke issue among women has too long been ignored. This is why the WHF wants to develop an international campaign to raise public awareness of women and cardiovascular disease.

The American Heart Association (AHA) and the World Heart Federation (WHF) were very pleased to announce a new collaboration designed to build on the success of the AHA Go Red for Women by expanding the program internationally. The AHA, which owns the global trademark for the program, has extended an international license to the World Heart Federation.

In this way, members of the WHF can benefit from the teaching and tools of the AHA program while adapting them to their national environment.

In 1997, the American Heart Association was the first voluntary health organization to take a stand on women and heart disease, with the launch of its "Take Wellness To Heart" awareness campaign by women for women. In February 2004, the American Heart Association launched Go Red For Women – a continuation of the effort that began in 1997, driving home the message to women that heart disease is their leading cause of death ... a fact