

Headway being made fighting communicable diseases globally: study

March 14 2011

Those working for healthier humans around the globe are making headway in fighting communicable diseases such as AIDS, malaria and diarrheal illness, according to research from the Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures in the University of Denver's (DU) Josef Korbel School of International Studies.

The center recently released the third in a series of five volumes that focus on human progress in which researchers explore topics such as education, poverty, infrastructure and governance. The latest book is [Improving Global Health: Forecasting the Next 50 Years](#) (Paradigm Publishers and Oxford University Press [India](#), 2011).

The latest volume sheds light on a transition the authors see occurring in global health— a transition of disease burdens from communicable diseases to chronic ones such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

The Pardee Center provided funding for the 345-page book, which includes end tables that forecast the futures of 183 countries in areas such as health, [poverty](#) and education. Barry Hughes, director of the Pardee Center and one of the volume's authors, says those tables — at nearly 140 pages — contain the most extensive set of global forecasts anywhere.

"Because of great advances, the number of deaths globally from communicable diseases has fallen significantly compared to deaths from

chronic diseases, which primarily affect the elderly," says Hughes. "This transformation is proceeding, and more rapidly and universally than most have realized."

Statistics already show a 50 percent higher rate of death globally from chronic disease than from communicable diseases, although there are still more years of potential life lost to communicable diseases because they kill more infants and children. By 2020, however, chronic diseases will even take more years of life than will communicable ones. The transition is both driven by and driving rapid population aging, even in developing countries.

Still, nearly 10 million children die every year, mostly from communicable diseases. Had children in poorer countries died at the same rate as those in high-income countries, there would have been about 9 million fewer child deaths that year.

"We're bringing the communicable diseases under control — [malaria](#) for example — with interventions such as more bed netting to protect from mosquitoes; [AIDS](#) death rates are also on a downward trend," Hughes says.

However, Hughes points out that some parts of Africa — particularly in the north and south — are experiencing higher obesity rates and rising incidences of associated diseases such as diabetes now that incomes are rising.

Another issue is environmental impacts on disease such as localized air pollution from the burning of solid fuels in poor countries. Hughes says they forecast a decrease in these problems, but disease related to urban air pollution and global warming is expected to increase.

Overall, Hughes says life expectancies are getting higher around the

globe, too. "We're doing many significant things right," he says. "We've been good, for example, at attacking specific diseases such as smallpox and polio. On a global basis we've seen some great success."

Nevertheless, Hughes says barriers to better health that still exist include money and the knowledge and technology to develop vaccines for malaria and AIDS. What's more, he says, it's difficult to set up comprehensive health services to treat a wide range of health threats. Examples of those threats are maternal mortality and heart disease.

The volume's other authors include Randall Kuhn, director of DU's Global Health Affairs program, Cecilia Peterson, Dale Rothman and José Solórzano. The book can be downloaded for free or ordered online.

Hughes spoke about analyzing worldwide solutions at the 2010 TEDxDU at the Newman Center for the Performing Arts on the University of Denver campus.

Provided by University of Denver

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