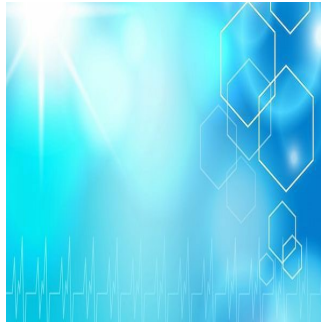

#ArabHealth 2015: Using Big Data To Address Public Health Needs



As part of the UAE vision 2021 to provide world-class healthcare to locals and expatriates, the UAE has been investing in developing nationwide systems to support and integrate digital health services and technologies into its healthcare ecosystem. A vital component of this effort is the move toward defining public health goals and devising evidence-based policies to tackle the UAE's most pressing healthcare challenges. According to data from the International Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, chronic lifestyle diseases, including diabetes and cardiovascular disease, place a heavy burden on the UAE healthcare resources. Big Data is rousing interest from policy makers and practitioners who will discuss the opportunities and challenges of using big data effectively and tangibly to improve everyday clinical practices and patient outcomes at the upcoming Arab Health Congress 2015.

According to a recent report by the US-UAE Business Council, almost 90 percent of deaths in the UAE are caused by chronic lifestyle-induced diseases such as diabetes, coronary and cardiovascular conditions, hypertension and cancer. As a result of urbanisation and rising disposable income, the majority of GCC population including the UAE, have adopted a sedentary lifestyle characterised by an aversion to exercise and consumption of processed foods leading to chronic diseases. With the prevalence of chronic diseases on the rise, new ways of managing public health are needed.

Big Data for public health is vital for a more efficient health landscape. According to Dr Amani Taha Osman, Consultant Paediatric Diabetologist, Imperial College London Diabetes Centre, Al Ain, UAE said: "To improve public health policy results, we need to establish figures through a comprehensive diabetes registry involving all paediatric diabetes patients throughout the UAE and to study and analyse this data. Comprehensive data and information will help improve diabetes care by understanding key trends of the country and identifying any attributes or factors that are unique to the region."

Dr Ravi Nair, Chair, Cardiovascular Medicine, Cleveland Clinic, Abu Dhabi added "Big data can contribute immensely to tackling cardiovascular disease; we need a big database that examines all data and population to identify risks and drivers of cardiovascular disease."

The commitment to digital health will be in full display at Arab Health Congress 2015 which will feature key discussions on big data and public health. The congress aims to highlight the benefits of Big Data in policy making by improving data exchange and collaboration across healthcare agencies and expand the coverage of adequate healthcare services to a wider population. In line with the vision of UAE leaders, health authorities are rapidly adopting IT solutions that will improve patient care and deliver better data for better decision-making.

Big Data and new technologies have the power to improve health. However, a holistic approach is necessary to tackle public health concerns. "Tackling chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease is a grass root effort; every home, school and institution needs to be involved in order to reduce its incidence," said Dr Nair. "Government initiatives to create public awareness and interventions that modify lifestyle habits have a significant effect in reducing the incidence of CVD," he added.

The need is similar for diabetes as Dr Osam points out: "A holistic approaches to healthcare, where all stakeholders are involved in decision making, is crucial for reducing the prevalence of type 2 diabetes. For children in particular, all those involved in their care need to be engaged, ranging from the child and family, doctors, diabetes educators, dieticians, schools, and the community at large."

More than 11,000 medical professionals are expected to attend the 2015 edition of the Arab Health Congress which is the world's largest multi-track medical congress offering 18 medical conferences. Arab Health is organised by Informa Life Sciences Exhibitions and will be held at the Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Center from 26-29 January 2015.

Source: Arab Health Congress

Image Credit: Forbes

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