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2014 | Day

World Sepsis Day 2014 - A call to action

Take action – help to increase awareness and participate in education about sepsis, support the World Sepsis Declaration by registering on the World Sepsis Day website and initiate quality improvement measures in your hospital or clinical area. Contribute with your organization to the correct recording of sepsis cases. Support our request to get sepsis on the agenda of the United Nations.

The number of sepsis cases is rising and still underestimated

To date we are experiencing an outbreak of Ebola virus disease in West Africa, which is the most severe in recorded history. Infection with this virulent and contagious agent leads to death from sepsis with multi-organ failure in 70 – 90% of sufferers. Since 1976, when it was first identified, this disease has killed about 2.000 people. Now, everything possible needs to be done by the national authorities and the international community to stop this frightening disaster. However, we should remind ourselves that this headline infection accounts for less than one thousandth of a percent of the 300 million deaths from infection globally in the same time frame. The world must face the fact that despite the advances of modern medicine, the fight against infectious diseases and sepsis is far from won.

The public is largely ignorant of the fact that sepsis – also called “blood poisoning” – can be triggered by almost any infectious disease and is responsible for almost 8 million annual deaths worldwide. The annual increase of sepsis cases in industrial nations by 7 – 8% over the last decade has remained largely unnoticed and un-commented. Sepsis cases are increasingly caused by viruses and multi-resistant bacteria. The U.S. National Center for Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued estimates derived from claims data that sepsis cases have increased in the U.S. from 621.000 in the year 2000 to 1.141.000 in 2008 (<http://www.cdc.gov/sepsis/basic/qa.html>).

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Overcome deficits in estimating sepsis cases – only what can be counted counts!

In the WHO's Global Burden of Disease Report (GBDR), sepsis appears only as „neonatal sepsis“ and ranks in 16th place, while about 60% of under 5 deaths are due to severe infections which should be but are not classified as sepsis. Sepsis as cause of death in adults also does not appear in the GBDR. Death from infectious diseases occurs when an infection develops into sepsis, but the GBDR lists only the underlying infectious disease. For instance, “infection of the lower airways” ranks second and “malaria” ranks 5th on the list of causes of death.

To correct this oversight, we need to achieve the following: a) make everyone understand, that infectious diseases only become deadly when they develop into sepsis with organ failure and b) get sepsis coded appropriately as primary and secondary diagnosis in hospitals under the International Classification of Diseases Systems of the WHO (ICD9 or ICD10). Furthermore, global and national burden of disease reports must take into account the number of deaths that occur due to sepsis complicating other diseases.

Start quality initiatives for effective sepsis prevention and therapy

Regardless of location, globally studies and quality initiatives in local hospitals to whole countries have shown that the rigorous implementation of measures for prevention, early recognition and appropriate therapy can effectively reduce the incidence of sepsis and cut the death rate from sepsis by at least 10 to 15%. We want to encourage health care authorities, health care providers, professional medical societies, physicians and health care workers in every country and at every level to create interdisciplinary coalitions for the implementation of these effective measures.

Educate the public about sepsis prevention measures and long-term outcomes from the disease

On the WHO website, sepsis does not appear in the A-Z list. It also does not appear as a cause of death except as „maternal sepsis“ and „sepsis in newborns“. Until the beginning of this year, sepsis did not appear on the CDC website. The same is true for other national centers for disease control. Meanwhile, individual and joint activities have achieved that the CDC in the U.S. and the German equivalent, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), have put sepsis into their A-Z lists (<http://www.cdc.gov/sepsis/>). The directors of the U.S. CDC and the German RKI are now ambassadors for World Sepsis Day.



The WHO has committed to extend their educational material on sepsis and to contribute to an improved representation of sepsis in the GBDR. This is only a start. We are proud to announce that World Sepsis Day website translations are now available in English and German, but also in Spanish (www.world-sepsis-day.org).

World Sepsis Day must become officially acknowledged by the General Assembly of the United Nations

Considering the global importance of the burden of sepsis, World Sepsis Day should become one of the “World Disease Days” acknowledged by the General Assembly (GA) of the UN, like those for Cancer, AIDS and Hepatitis C. Key representatives of the WHO have encouraged us to apply for this endorsement. However, to get sepsis on the agenda of the GA requires the request of two or three nations.

This means that we need the support of at least two national ministries of health. If you feel that you can help us by talking to the respective government authority in your country please let us know and we will provide you with necessary informational material.

On behalf of the Global Sepsis Alliance and the international World Sepsis Day Steering Committee,

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