PASCAR Report

Development of the certificate course in the management of hypertension in Africa (CCMH-Africa): proceedings of the first continental faculty meeting, Nairobi, Kenya, 25–26 February 2018


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Abstract

Background: In response to the call by the World Health Organisation to reduce premature deaths from non-communicable diseases by 25% by the year 2025 (25×25), the Pan-African Society of Cardiology (PASCAR), in partnership with several organisations, including the World Heart Federation, have developed an urgent 10-point action plan to improve detection, treatment and control of hypertension in Africa. Priority six of this action plan is to promote a task-shifting/task-sharing approach in the management of hypertension.

Aim: This capacity-building initiative aims to enhance the knowledge, skills and core competencies of primary health-care physicians in the management of hypertension and related complications.

Methods: In a collaborative approach with the International Society of Hypertension, the British and Irish Hypertension Society, the Public Health Foundation of India and the Centre for Chronic Disease Control, the PASCAR hypertension taskforce held a continental faculty meeting in Kenya on 25 and 26 February 2018 to review and discuss a process of effective contextualisation and implementation of the Indian hypertension management course on the African continent.

Results: A tailored African course in terms of evidence-based learning, up-to-date curriculum and on-the-job training was developed with a robust monitoring and evaluation strategy. The course will be offered on a modular basis with a judicious mix of case studies, group discussions and contact sessions, with great flexibility to accommodate participants’ queries.

Conclusions: Hypertension affects millions of people in Africa and if left untreated is a major cause of heart disease, kidney disease and stroke. CCMH-Africa will train in the next 10 years, 25 000 certified general physicians and 50 000 nurses, capable of adequately managing uncomplicated hypertension, thereby freeing the few available specialists to focus on severe or complicated cases.

Keywords: hypertension, roadmap, certified course, primary care physicians, Africa


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Hypertension is a rapidly growing epidemic in Africa. This increasingly high prevalence is coupled with very poor awareness, and low treatment and control rates, putting affected persons at highest risk for stroke, heart and renal diseases.1-3 African Union member states described hypertension as the continent’s greatest health challenge after HIV/AIDS. An urgency was recognised to develop and share best practices, including affordable and effective community-based programmes to detect, treat and control hypertension.

As the leading continental association, the Pan-African Society of Cardiology (PASCAR), supported by the World Heart Federation roadmap to Africa and all continental hypertension and cardiac societies, published the 10-point action plan to significantly improve control of hypertension, in an attempt to reduce heart disease and stroke on the continent by the year 2025. Target six of this action plan aims to shift the paradigm in hypertension management via promoting a task-shifting/task-sharing approach, with adequate training of non-specialists.

The certificate course in the management of hypertension will be the educational cornerstone and training guide needed to ultimately control hypertension in Africa. It aims to enhance the knowledge, skills and core competencies of primary care physicians in the management of hypertension and related complications.

This course is a joint certification programme to be issued by PASCAR, in collaboration with the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), British and Irish Hypertension Society (BIHS), International Society of Hypertension (ISH) and Centre for Chronic Disease Control (CCDC), supported by local governments and academics. This unique capacity-building initiative will provide exceptional education and address several issues that arise in the management of hypertension, such as the very low doctor-to-patient ratios, concentration of the few specialists in urban areas, and inadequate training in the management of hypertension at graduate level.

It is in this regard that the continental faculty meeting was held at Nairobi, Kenya, on 25 and 26 February 2018. The event witnessed the gathering of six esteemed international experts and 20 representatives from PASCAR, PHFI, BIHS, the African Heart Network (AHN) and the Kenyan Ministry of Health. These experts reviewed the course in terms of evidence-based learning with an up-to-date curriculum contextualised to the African setting, aimed at training 50 000 nurses and 25 000 certified general physicians who would adequately manage uncomplicated hypertension, thereby freeing the few available specialists to focus on severe or complicated cases.
Welcome address and review of draft modules

Prof Elijah Ogola (Kenya), the chairperson for the meeting, welcomed the audience to Nairobi and congratulated the PHFI for their marvellous work and relentless effort to share their ideas with other partners.

Dr Saad Subhanni (Sudan), president of PASCAR, welcomed the delegates and thanked all the stakeholders for their support of and commitment to this inaugural meeting. In his opening address, he gave a brief overview of PASCAR (founded by Prof Ayodele Falase), explaining it as an organisation of physicians and surgeons across Africa, involved in the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular diseases. He further spoke briefly on the organogram of PASCAR, its governing council task forces, with representation from key role players in cardiovascular sub-specialties.

Dr Subahi’s address was followed by a short speech by Prof Anastase Dzudie (Cameroon), chair of the hypertension task force, who set the pace for the meeting. He gave a brief overview of the burden of hypertension in Africa and the roadmap to achieving 25% control by 2025. In his remarks, he highlighted target six of the 10-point action plan, identified by the PASCAR hypertension task force, which includes a shifting of the paradigm of hypertension management by promoting a task-sharing approach, and the certificate course in the management of hypertension in Africa (CCMH-Africa) will be one such initiative.

He informed the gathering about the vast coverage of this course, with enormous success in India, and explained how a similar approach will be customised to the African context. In the African context, such a project has the potential to build on the existing health systems and strengthen a direct referral linkage for the management of hypertension between nurses, general practitioners and specialists.

Prof Neil Poulter, president of the ISH, expressed how proud they were to be part of the collaboration between PHFI and PASCAR in extending the reach of a certified course in the management of hypertension from India to the African continent. He also illustrated how ISH is committed to promoting/encouraging the advancement of scientific research and its application for the prevention and management of cardiovascular diseases around the world. His two key aspirations are to support younger members (organisation members) and reach out to as many countries globally as possible. He highlighted the May Measurement Month survey as an example of such aspiration.

Prof Francesco Cappuccio, president of the BIHS, presented opening remarks on behalf of his organisation, highlighting briefly the partnership between BIHS and CCMH, and the journey in making this initiative possible. He warmly welcomed this new initiative, which would provide access to valuable specialist training to many doctors and health professionals in Africa, sorely needed on a continent where the double burden of disease (communicable and non-communicable) is projected to cause high mortality and morbidity rates and long-term disabilities.

Dr Sandeep Bhalla (India), programme director, Centre for Control of Chronic Conditions and Injuries (CCCCI), gave the programme overview of CCMH-Africa. He mentioned that the journey of this capacity-building initiative was started by the PHFI in the year 2015 and how the programme had received an overwhelming response from its participants. He also graded the compliance rate a success in India and stated how several government institutions are adopting the programme for the training of their medical officers. Salient features of the course were outlined and the audience was briefed on the various models. In his second presentation, he gave a rundown of the course implementation, and proposed methods to facilitate this task.

Finally, Dr Arun Jose (India), programme manager CCMH-India, apprised the gathering about the CCMH-Africa course design protocol and group working guidelines, followed by the release of the course brochure.

Overall discussion and way forward

The group recognised the urgent need to develop a course that will empower and improve the core competencies of primary care physicians in the management of hypertension. To accomplish the objectives of the meeting, four group experts were formed to review the modules, with one rapporteur from each group to facilitate the discussion and record notes/comments. Each group of experts then reviewed the designated module and suggested changes in that particular module. In the final session, one representative from each group presented the modules they had reviewed and their suggested changes to the rest of the audience for their feedback. The session witnessed intense discussions, and general consensus was achieved on each topic. After the in-depth brainstorming sessions, the curriculum was reviewed meticulously and the active participation of the experts was noteworthy.

Fig. 1. Roll-out plan for CCMH-Africa (ideal model).
The course will be valid, reproducible, clear, simple and concise enough to be easily adopted by various African countries and monitored regularly. For the roll-out plan of the course (Fig. 1), the consensus was that different language versions of the course will be produced and implementation will be done by PASCAR’s organisational structure through the various national cardiac societies. There was a consensus that under PASCAR leadership, funds should be raised both at international and national levels to support the running of the course.

The following key stakeholders will be involved in the developmental process: PASCAR, PHFI, BIHS, ISH, CCDC, African Union and WHO-AFRO. Finally the group adopted a timeline of activities for the finalisation and implementation of the suggestions relevant to the African context and a regional faculty meeting was planned for two month’s time.

Conclusion

The curriculum of the Indian CCMH course was customised to a tailored African version that met the needs of the urgent paradigm shift in hypertension management in Africa. The key next steps are implementation of the course in all African countries, with translated versions into French, Portuguese, Arabic and local languages. National cardiac societies, all professional and non-professional organisations (including the African Heart Network and the International Forum for Hypertension Prevention and Control in Africa) and various stakeholders (including the African Union, ministries of health and the WHO) will be called upon to support this course that has been designed to significantly improve the management of hypertension in Africa.

African CCMH in brief

The primary objective of this capacity-building initiative is to enhance the knowledge, skills and core competencies of primary care physicians in the management of hypertension and related complications. In addition, there are three secondary objectives:

• to develop/update a standard teaching protocol and module for evidence-based learning in hypertension
• to build a network of primary care physicians and specialists in the field of hypertension
• to regularly update the primary care physicians with the latest advancements in the field of hypertension.

Course design and duration

CCMH-Africa is a unique course in terms of evidence-based learning, an up-to-date curriculum with inputs from international experts and regional faculty, on-the-job training, and robust monitoring and supervision strategy.

Ideally, the total duration of the course is 10 months with a once-a-month contact session scheduled on a designated weekend at regional centres.

The course will be offered on a modular basis with a judicious mix of case studies, group discussions and contact sessions, with great flexibility to accommodate participants’ queries. The course content will be delivered by trained faculty, all of whom are eminent cardiologists/medicine specialists.

Eligibility criteria

• MB BS (or country-specific equivalent) with a minimum of three years of clinical experience.
• MD/DNB (medicine/internal medicine/family medicine) or country-specific equivalent.

Certification criteria

The criteria for successful completion of the programme are as follows:

• Participation in at least nine out of 10 monthly contact sessions (including the pre-test of each module).
• Completion of assigned course work.
• Passing of the final written examination in the form of 50 multiple-choice questions, with a minimum pass mark of 70%.

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References