

Research

Wellcome Trust U.K. awards \$ 0.5M research grant to Aga Khan University Clinical Epidemiology Unit

The Wellcome Trust UK has awarded Dr. Tazeen Jafar, Director of the Clinical Epidemiology Unit (CEU) of The Aga Khan University (AKU-CEU), and her colleagues a research grant of US\$500,000 to assess cost-effective strategies for control of hypertension in Pakistan.

The three-year investigator-initiated intervention project will employ cluster randomization and a factorial design to assess the effect of population-based health education by community health workers on blood pressure levels of the population aged 5 years or over (n=20,000). It will also develop and test the cost-effectiveness of hypertension management strategies administered by intensively trained local general practitioners.

Hypertension afflicts about 20% of the population in Pakistan aged 15 years and older. Poverty limits access of majority of this group to the required treatment. The new strategies, if proven better than the existing health care services in Pakistan, would serve as a model for the much-needed hypertension control programs in Pakistan and other countries in the region. The project directly relates to AKU-CEU's mission: improvement of health of individuals and populations by promoting equitable, evidence-based and good quality health care.

The study is especially designed to make use of the existing health care resources, thereby optimizing sustainability of the strategies to be tested. To date, this is the largest intervention study on hypertension control in Pakistan.

This study is a follow-up of the Wellcome Trust-funded pilot project that was completed by Dr. Jafar and her colleagues at AKU and the Imperial College, United Kingdom. "The successful funding of this research project is a reflection of the relevance and quality of this study as well as the confidence of the funding agency in our researchers and institution," says Dr. Jafar.

The pilot study indicated that Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, has a high rate of coronary artery disease (CAD), with 26.9 % of 320 randomly selected adults aged 40 years or older suffering from the disease. Factors associated with CAD included gender, current tobacco use, systolic blood pressure and proteinuria.

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