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Press Release: Sugar-stimulated diabetes striking Kenyans as young as 16 years

With Kenyans now consuming twice as much sugar as is safe, Type 2 diabetes - caused by excessive sugar consumption and poor lifestyles - is striking Kenyans as young as 16 years old. 5 per cent of Kenyans in their 20s are now suffering from the permanent and debilitating condition, which causes comas, blindness, leg amputations and kidney failure.

Traditionally a condition of the elderly, the disease, which half of sufferers do not even know they have until it's too late, is now striking out Kenyan youth in ever rising numbers, prompting a coalition of health campaigners and bodies led by Broadway Bakery Ltd. to launch a three-day free diabetes testing drive to mark World Diabetes Day, this year falling on Monday 14th November.

Almost 5,000 free tests, which involve a split-second needle prick to the thumb, will be facilitated by Broadway Bakery in conjunction with the County Government of Kiambu Health Department, Nairobi Hospital, Jalaram Medical Services and Chemoquip Ltd. on Saturday 12th November at the Christina Wangari Gardens, Thika, on Sunday 13th November at the Hub, Nairobi, and on Monday 14th November outside Kencom House, Nairobi, all from 9 am - 5 pm. The testing will also check for blood pressure and body mass index (BMI).

“At the current prevalence rates, the testing is set to alert as many as 500 sufferers to a condition that, if managed, need not be a killer,” said Mr. Bimal Shah, MD of Broadway Bakery, which has driven and funded the three-day testing drive.

“Poor lifestyles, limited exercise and high sugar, fat and salt diets are converting into an array of lifestyle diseases that are set to be the cause of death for 60 per cent of Kenyans by the year 2030,” said Mr. Shah. “But of all of them, the condition galloping the fastest in Kenya and killing the most Kenyans is diabetes.”

“If Kenyans do not stop ladling sugar into their tea and coffee, drinking sugar-laden beverages and exposing their children to sugary and sweet treats in large quantities, diabetes is on its way to becoming a catastrophe for both the health system and the nation,” he said.

The killer disease has already afflicted almost every family in Kenya, with a recent study commissioned by Broadway Bakery finding that almost every Kenyan has a member of their close family or friends suffering from diabetes.

With now more than 7 per cent of Kenyans by their 30s and more than 10 per cent of over-40 year olds suffering from diabetes, the surge in youth diabetes is set to move the proportion of suffering Kenyans to a fifth or more in decades ahead.

“Without proper treatment and care, diabetes kills relatively quickly. Yet, almost 50 per cent of people with Type 2 diabetes are not even aware they have the condition,” said Mr. Shah.

“Our mission on World Diabetes Day this year is to find and identify as many Kenyans suffering from undiagnosed diabetes as possible, in a drive that we hope will save hundreds of lives in a single weekend.”

Last year, over 500,000 Kenyans were diagnosed with diabetes, with a worrying rise in cases among children and young people.

“More and more children and youth are developing Type 2 diabetes, a condition that belonged to the older adult population, creating the need to start advocacy and preventive educative programs early,” said Mr. Shah.

“Early diagnosis is the key to survival and a healthy life,” he said, with the testing drive marking a next step in Broadway Bakery’s #BeSugarSmart public education campaign, which is aimed at creating awareness on the dangers of high sugar intake.

“Diabetes is manageable and not necessarily a death sentence. You only need to get tested to know whether you have it or not. There is a need for more awareness, especially among the young, since it is a group that is usually neglected,” said Mr. Shah.

Broadway Bakery would like to invite and encourage everyone to get involved in their activities commemorating World Diabetes Day. For more information, visit www.broadway.co.ke.

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