

World Health Day 2012



AGEING AND HEALTH

Good health adds life to years



A report of the official ceremony and screening organised by ASI in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

April 2012

Introduction

World Health Day is observed worldwide on April 7 each year to draw the international community's attention on an important public health issue. This year's theme focuses on Health and Ageing and the accompanying slogan is: **Good health adds life to years**. This year's celebration marks the 64th birthday of the World Health Organisation.

In The Gambia, the celebration took place at Fajikunda Health where Ageing with a Smile Initiative (ASI) partnered with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the World Health Organisation to organise a free screening and consultation programme for the elderly alongside the official ceremony which took place in the morning of the 7th April.

The official ceremony was chaired by Mr Juma Jallow, the Regional Public Health Nurse-RHT-Western and the key speakers at the ceremony included Mr Yaya Sirreh Jallow, the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Dr Thomas Sukwa, the WHO Representative in The Gambia, Dr Ibrahim Malick Samba and



Balla Musa Joof, the Secretary General of Ageing with a Smile Initiative. The official ceremony was graced with a lot of dignitaries and community elders including the National Assembly members for Serrekunda East and Majority Leader in the National Assembly, the Mayor of Kanifing, the Director of Health Services, the Director of Social Welfare, the Director of National AIDs Secretariat, the Chief Nursing Officer, representatives of the Medical Research Council, Catholic Relief Services, Gambia Food and Nutrition Association, Riders for Health and the community of Fajikunda.

Speaking on behalf of Hon. Fatim Badjie, the Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Mr Yaya Sirreh Jallow, the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare stated that the Ministry under the dynamic leadership of President Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh goes beyond just raising awareness to pursuing positive and concrete initiatives and interventions aimed at protecting and promoting the health of the

elderly. The Permanent Secretary reported that the elderly accounts for about 5% of the population and listed the main health risks associated with ageing as: hypertension, diabetes, dental problems, mental disorders and arthritis. He called on society to care for the aged and encourage their active participation in socio-economic development. He also urged everyone to promote and engage in healthy lifestyles such as taking regular exercise and eating healthy foods.



Mr Yaya Sirreh Jallow and Dr Thomas Sukwa

The WHO Country representative, Dr Thomas Sukwa, revealed that the world population is rapidly ageing, that between the year 2000 and 2050, the proportion of the world's population over 60 years will double from about 11% to 22%. He noted that the number of people aged 60 years and over is expected to increase from 605 million to 2 billion over the same period. Dr Sukwa reported that the main health problems of older people are mainly non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, stroke and chronic lung disease. He noted that the greatest causes of disability are visual impairment, dementia, hearing loss and osteoarthritis.

Dr Sukwa highlighted the fact that many older persons lose their ability to live independently because of limited mobility, frailty or other physical or mental health problems. He added that many require long-term care, including home-based nursing, community, residential and hospital-based care and thus recommended the

creation of supportive 'age-friendly' environments to allow older people to live fuller lives and maximize their contributions to society.



Dr Sukwa pointed out that the establishment of Ageing with a Smile Initiative (ASI) in The Gambia is a clear demonstration of the concern citizens have for the welfare of the elderly. He thanked the pioneers of the initiative and assured the organisation of WHO's continued support and collaboration through the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in advancing the welfare of the elderly in the Gambia.

Mr Balla Musa Joof, the Secretary General of ASI gave a detailed report of ASI's activities during the past 2 years which was used to pilot a set of interventions in the Greater Banjul Area. Mr Joof highlighted the key achievements of the organisation during its pilot phase and used the occasion to share key lessons learnt, constraints and recommendations for improving the situation of older persons in The Gambia. Before Mr Joof made his statement, a minute's



silence was observed in remembrance of the late Dr Abubacarr Gaye, the former Minister of Health and Social Welfare and Dr Mamo Jawla, a former staff of WHO. It

should be noted that ASI was officially launched by Dr Gaye on January 10, 2010 at the Kanifing Municipal Council. Both doctors have been very supportive to ASI.

ASI used the occasion to award certificates of appreciation to its volunteers, members and supporters including Mrs Fatou Ceesay Nyabally of the RVTH, Dr Ibrahim Malick Samba, Dr Alieu Gaye of Pakala Clinic and Mr Omar Jah of Riders for Health.



Dr Gaye receiving his certificate

Dr Samba made a brief remark in which he underscored the importance of supporting and promoting the health of older persons. He stated that he is now unable to climb stairs without support – something we never thought of. Dr Samba commended the Gambia Government for making health care a key development priority.

To reinforce the key messages of the day, the NSGA Drama Troupe and the Fajikunda Red Cross link performed powerful skits on the situation of the elderly with emphasis on good nutrition and exercise. At the end of their performance, the NSGA Drama Troupe helped raised up to D1400 from the dignitaries who attended the programme. The funds will be used to support the work of ASI.



Dr Samba delivering his statement

Mrs Mary Smart Joiner alias Aunty Maga who is also a member of ASI celebrated her 79th birthday on World Health Day. She was at the ceremony and was given a birthday present by ASI. Aunty Maga had in the past actively participated in the activities conducted by ASI including a fundraising sponsored walk from West Field to Traffic Lights.



A cross section of the elders at the programme

The vote of thanks at the official ceremony was given by Aisha Metta Kongira, a member of staff of Fajikunda Health Centre who is also a member of ASI.

The screening was widely publicised using the radio, television, social media (mainly Facebook) and community-based mobilisation conducted by the staff of Fajikunda Health Centre. Over 300 older persons responded to the invitation. We've received reports that some of the elders reported to the health centre as early as 5am. To

respond to the large turnout of patients, ASI and the Fajikunda Health Centre mobilised a large volunteers including medical doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, pharmacy assistants and eye health workers. A total of 12 consultation rooms were opened in order to reduce the waiting time for the elderly.

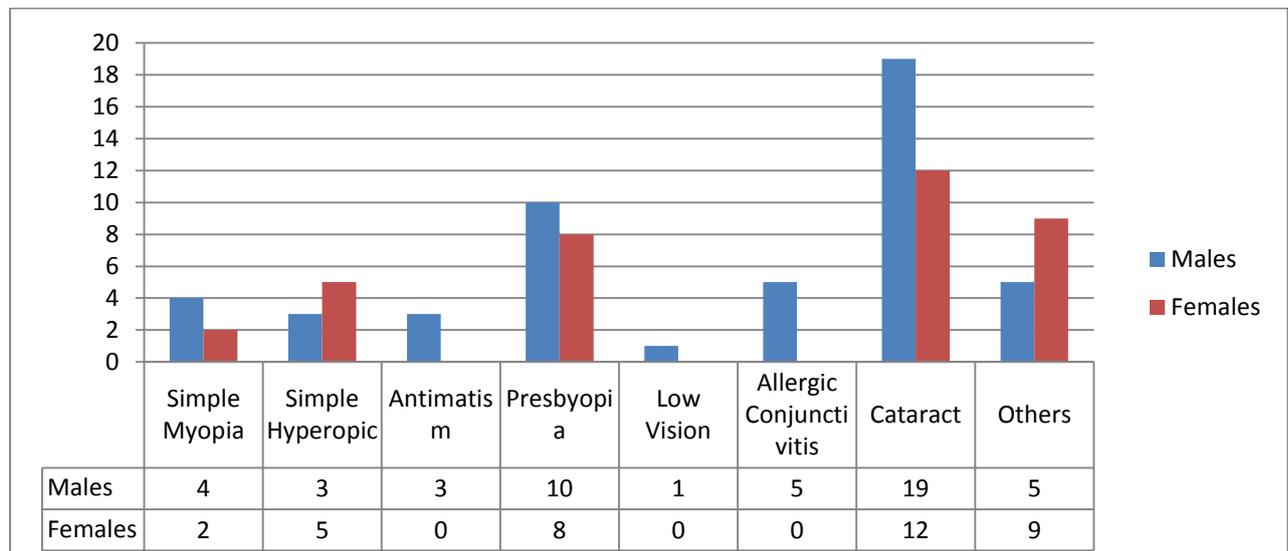
As part of the screening, which ran up to 5pm, ASI distributed 150 long lasting insecticide treated mosquito nets and about 100 towels donated by Hearts for The Gambia.



The NSGA Drama Troupe performing their skit and also raising funds for ASI

Results of the screening

Sight testing



Programme Evaluation

Based on the feedback received during the programme and the comments posted on the ASI Facebook page, the programme was rated as highly successful. The indicators for this include:

- The impressive response from older persons from Fajikunda, Latrikunda, Tallinding, Abuko, Lamin and the neighbouring communities that form the catchment area of Fajikunda Health Centre
- There was a large and positive response from medical volunteers from the RVTH, Pakala Clinic and Sheikh Zayed Regional Eye Care Centre
- A large representation by senior Ministry of Health officials
- An impressive response from partners including MRC, CRS, Child Fund, GAFNA
- There was adequate supply of essential medications to cater for the needs of the elderly
- The TV and newspaper coverage was very good. GRTS reported the programme and we've also seen the reports by the Point, Foroyaa and the Daily Observer newspapers which are available online from the following links:

<http://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/article/world-health-day-commemorated-in-the-gambia>

<http://www.foroyaa.gm/modules/news/article.php?storyid=9428&keywords=world+health>

<http://observer.gm/africa/gambia/article/the-elderly-constitutes-5-of-the-population-says-ps-jallow>

More photos from the programme



Members of ASI with some of the staff of Fajikunda Health Centre at the end of the programme

