THE ROLE OF ROTARY IN PRE-CONCEPTION CARE

ORAL PRESENTATION BY HARISH BHATT
Former Governor of Rotary International in Tanzania and Uganda, Dar Es Salaam, Sep 22, 2015

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TITLE
The role of Rotary in strengthening pre-conception and inter-conception care

ABSTRACT
Rotary, the greatest worldwide humanitarian service organization, consists of 1.2 million leaders and professionals who voluntarily share their personal and vocational reference, knowledge and networks to provide chances to other people lacking the opportunities they got.
Rotary is organized in 34,000 Rotary clubs, each with a varied membership of adult characters and vocations, and without limitations on the basis of gender, race, color, creed, national origin or sexual orientation. Rotarians collaborate in fellowship over boundaries.
Rotary has a Foundation focusing on peace and conflict prevention or resolution, disease prevention and treatment, water and sanitation, maternal and child health, basic education and literacy, economic and community development. Rotary started the successful Polio Eradication Initiative in the eighties of last century.
Recently the Rotarian Action Group for Healthy Pregnancies, Healthy Children was established to stimulate and support Rotarians and their clubs with projects in the field of disease prevention and maternal and child health, including strengthening preconception care. Not only by funding but for all through offering their organizational skills and professional networks (head, heart, hands) Rotarians can also create awareness and enhance preventive initiatives on local, regional national and international level.

Some Rotary projects and plans will be shown and eventually discussed.
HARISH BHATT:

MISTER CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Let me start my speech with words of gratitude to the organizers of the conference and of this symposium. I’m proud and thankful to have the opportunity here to explain the role of Rotary in pre-conception care. Also I’m glad to have the opportunity to welcome you in my city and country. I hope that you enjoy your stay in Dar Es Salaam.

That I, being an ICT and banking expert, stand before you is typically Rotary. As former governor of Rotary in Tanzania and Uganda I am the highest Rotary leader here in Dar Es Salaam. The Dutch pediatrician Jan Lucas Ket had the same position in Amsterdam. He asked me and so I give our joined presentation as an example of international cooperation and fellowship.

ABOUT PRE-CONCEPTION CARE.
We all know that the pre-conception phase is crucial for the benefit of a safe motherhood and the birth of healthy children. In short: we talk here about care for a healthy pregnancy resulting in a healthy child.
We all know the set of scientifically sound pre-conceptive recommendations regarding environment, lifestyle, nutrition and health to gain that goal. These recommendations may differ geographically and may be prioritized depending on political, social and economic circumstances and the state of public health. We also realize that these recommendations should be cohesive and lead to effective interventions with broad public and professional support.

It is not according my profession to focus here on medical issues as genetics, medication and vitamin status. I’m happy that pre-conception care is far more than that. Pre-conception care is in the first place about awareness and responsibility. Indeed, ideally, future parents are aware of their responsibility for the next generation. Amply before conception of their child, they should be properly informed and counseled; they should create a safe and stable home; and they should take proper measures concerning their own health. Pre-conception care starts with a safe environment, with hygiene, with lack of poverty and with education: basic education and education in life-style and feeding.

THAT BRINGS US TO ROTARY.
Rotary, ladies and gentlemen, is a worldwide humanitarian service organization, actually it is the greatest humanitarian service organization. We, Rotarians, are 1.2 million leaders and professionals in our communities. We share voluntarily our knowledge, professional background and network to give chances to people who didn’t get the opportunities we had. We give these chances in our own communities, but also far away.
We are gathered in 34,000 Rotary clubs, there we work in fellowship together in as much vocational diversity as possible, men and women, without limitations on the basis of gender, race, color, creed, national origin or sexual orientation.

In Rotary we communicate, we make connections, we share ideas and then: we take action. Rotary works in fellowship over boundaries, with no governments in between, in more than 200 countries or territories. Globally.

Rotary has a strong 200 million dollar fund, the Rotary Foundation, which focuses on peace and prevention of conflicts, disease prevention, mother and child care, safe drinking water and sanitation, literacy and basic education, and on economic development of small communities. Rotary started the successful Polio Eradication Initiative in the eighties of last century.

Rotary projects are concrete contributions to improvements, they bring ideas from papers to practice. Rotary projects are also founded in the local community, not plugged in.

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**HOW DOES ROTARY WORK?**

Rotarians are not poor, mostly quite well-to-do, but in general not very rich. Sure, we give money and we can influence others to donate as well. But Rotarians are better in working with their heads, hearts and hands. Rotary is not an ATM, not a cash dispenser. Rotary can influence other people, contributing its 1.2 million professional networks all over the world.

Besides international contacts on the highest level, Rotarians talk and work together with their own governments, with local politicians, religious leaders, financial and logistic partners and health workers.

Thus not only by funding, but for all through offering their organizational skills and professional networks Rotarians can create awareness and enhance preventive initiatives on local, regional national and international level.

In general Rotary projects are characterized by leadership quality, variation and differentiation, and sustainability. Often they are a startup, after the initial phase the project is handed over to the community.

**THAT BRINGS US TO THE ROLE OF ROTARY IN PRE-CONCEPTION CARE.**

First of all Rotary can create awareness: personal and in the own family, in Rotary clubs and youth clubs (we have the organization Rotaract within our family of Rotary), in the community and
widespread by public relation professionals and key persons. This awareness should lead to the earlier mentioned responsibility and care by the future parents. May they find professional advice for instance through a good website or personal contact with a skilled and trained health care worker.

Rotarians can promote and enhance pre-conception care in their own vocational environment as part of their ethical standard: creating and maintaining a safe working area for women, already before pregnancy and lactation.

Rotary clubs and districts organize hundreds of programs focussing on peace, youth, water, education, poverty, health care. It is quite easy to include aspects of pre- and inter-conception care in these programs which are as such already enhancing pre-conception care. An example is the introduction of preventive and pre-conception measures in a sustainable healthcare program for save births in Lahore, Pakistan.

Rotary clubs can organize a special pre-conception program: for instance an education project for schoolgirls in Suriname.

Most interesting is the Rotary induced multi-stakeholder round table conference on pre-conception care for a country or a geographic area as a state or province, or a town. We have the roadmap ready to use. Such a conference leads to a set of scientifically sound and cohesive pre-conceptive recommendations and interventions by professionals for the general public, especially future parents.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

The Rotarian Action Group Healthy Pregnancies / Healthy Children just started this year to promote pre-conception care. My presentation is a direct consequence of its existence.

I ask Rotarians in this audience to join this RAG. I ask Rotarians in this audience also to communicate within their own club and with other clubs nearby about how to address local needs. To communicate about small projects to raise awareness and enhance information and education for the promotion of folic acid and hygiene, to prevent too early pregnancies and stunting growth by insufficient feeding, to keep girls in school, etcetera.

The non-Rotarians in my audience I advice to discuss their very local situation with colleagues. Together they could make a simple needs assessment leading, with members of a Rotary club, to a stakeholder conference or to other projects.

For non-Rotarians my introduction in Rotary may lead to membership. We are always interested in leaders and professionals to join us, to share ideas and to take action.

Thank you for your attention.