Letter to Editor

mHealth in Screening for Noncommunicable Diseases: The Untold Tale

The global burden and threat of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) constitute a major public health challenge that undermines social and economic development throughout the world. India is also experiencing a rapid health transition with a rising burden of NCDs.[1] In 2010, the National Program for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular diseases and Stroke was launched with the aim of early diagnosis and effective treatment of NCDs.[2] Despite these public health initiatives, the NCD control in India is still in the fledgling stages.[3]

The resource crunch in the nascent public health system of our country has led to deficiencies in early diagnosis and treatment of NCDs. With all these odds against the containment of the disease, the only hope is availability of cost-effective screening tools. It is proven that the disease outcomes are better if the NCDs are detected in the early stages. Although screening is made accessible and affordable, it is poorly utilized by the community. Hence, there is a need for effective system to ensure utilization of screening of NCDs.

Robust community data are imperative for implementing the mHealth strategy. The contact information available in the linkages with the self-help groups and primary health centers will be of immense help in project implementation. There are very few information and communication technology initiatives focusing on improving the health status of the community. There is an urgent need to address the poor utilization of NCD screening by implementation of mHealth strategy to mobilize the community, creating awareness about the disease among general public, and using mobile data collection tools such as EpiCollect among grass root health workers, primary health-care staff, and interventions to utilize mobile phones in screening of NCDs. As seen in other mHealth promotion examples from other disease areas – maternal and child health for example – mobile technology can improve access to information. In NCD screening, this could be used to improve the awareness of the importance of screening and of how to access the service. This has already been conducted successfully in one trial, carried out in a high-income country setting, where information delivered by SMS noted a 23% increase in female screening rates.[4] In NCD screening, mobile technology could play a role if properly designed and applied.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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