



GSO Roundtable, 6 May 2010

Stemming the Tide: Addressing the Diabetes Epidemic through the Workplace

Summary and Action Points

The Geneva Social Observatory convened a consultative roundtable on 6 May 2010 to build on lessons learned and identify future directions for promoting the GSO *Workplace Strategy on Diabetes and Wellness*. This *Workplace Strategy* had been adopted at a GSO Forum in Geneva in September 2008, following a series of roundtables and workshops starting in September 2006. Since then, the objective has been to apply the GSO template to national and local circumstances to address the diabetes epidemic through the workplace in specific action programmes. In the first year of implementation, the GSO introduced the *Workplace Strategy* in the three countries of Poland (2 June 2009), Turkey (20 to 21 June 2009) and the Russian Federation (15 September 2009). Participants in the country-level programmes were invited to assess the usefulness of the *Workplace Strategy* and to recommend priorities for what needs to happen, what each actor can do and what is still missing from the *Strategy*. Their recommendations were consolidated into a summary of lessons learned for participants in the May roundtable to evaluate and propose future directions.

Lessons learned from the three country-level initiatives

1. National focus on health and workplace policy is important.
2. Working with national networks (institutes, NGOs) is also important.
3. Legal framework for health policies may need to be adapted to preventive action and early interventions – innovative treatments, etc.
4. Legal framework may also need to be modified regarding the role of occupational safety and health services.
5. Expanded role and training for occupational health nurses should be emphasized
6. Prevention and wellness schemes should be part of occupational health services
7. The national diabetes associations are important support networks that can be mobilized to promote workplace strategies.
8. Employers need to have strong evidence on costs and benefits of action.
9. Both employer leadership and active involvement of workers' organizations are needed for including the issue in workplace policies, whether through formal bargaining or informal consultations.
10. Ministries of health and labour should also be included in the implementation strategy.



Drawing from these recommendations and from the overall experience in each of the three countries, the participants in the May roundtable agreed that future implementation of the *Workplace Strategy* had been strengthened by the lessons learned in these three country programmes. They also offered additional insights and guidance, as follows:

Insights from Roundtable Participants

1. Positioning the diabetes initiative with NCDs generally will strengthen the message about diabetes and its relationship to other NCDs, since the majority of the workforce is affected by at least one if not more of the NCDs.
2. Communication and education about high blood pressure, obesity, smoking and the overall benefits of prevention are urgently needed.
3. CEO and senior leadership engagement should have a high priority.
4. The GSO should focus primarily on strategies targeted to SMEs, especially in developing countries, including through supply chains of MNEs.
5. Opportunities for mobilizing all levels of health professions and patient support advocacy groups to work with employers and workers organizations should be maximized.
6. New thinking should be embraced around the concept of occupational safety and health (i.e. health promotion), rather than occupational health and safety (disease and risk management).
7. The role of industrial relations through sports and physical activity can combine both good industrial relations and opportunities for physical activity in the workplace setting.
8. The issues of differential treatment and specific accommodations for people with diabetes in the workplace require continuing refinement to reflect the latest knowledge and treatments.
9. How to influence behavior outside the workplace without undue employer pressure to change behavior is another issue for continuing dialogue and debate.
10. Promoting advocacy by health and labour ministries should be an integral part of the Workplace Strategy.

The Geneva Social Observatory appreciates the lessons learned from the participants in the three national programmes and the guidance from the participants in the consultative roundtable. Detailed reports of each country-level programme and of the May roundtable are available on request. The future direction for implementation of the *Workplace Strategy on Diabetes and Wellness* will benefit from incorporating these points into specific follow-up proposals. Further efforts at implementation of the workplace strategy in the current target countries and/or others will require additional resources. The GSO is soliciting those resources and would welcome contributions by you and your organizations for this cause.