



Bone and Joint Decade 2010 -2020

October, 2011 Dear Colleagues

The Bone and Joint Decade the Global Alliance for Musculoskeletal Health

With the World Network Conference in Beirut less than a week away, this is a timely opportunity to remind you of the continued challenges that we face and also to bring you up to date with the recent activities of our organisation.

Our goal is to ensure musculoskeletal conditions are among the leading major health concerns in the minds and actions of opinion formers in countries throughout the world.

As you know, present health priorities in no way reflect the enormous impact these conditions have on individuals and society. Many musculoskeletal conditions are preventable or can be managed to enable those affected to lead a fuller and productive life. The result would be a reduced financial burden on world economies. Yet many governments fail to recognise such gains. They are not prioritised within the World Health Organisation (WHO) Strategy for Non-Communicable Diseases.

Musculoskeletal Conditions and the World Health Organisation

The Strategic Action Plan was presented at the World Network Conference in Lund in 2010. A key objective of the plan was to gain recognition and prioritisation of musculoskeletal conditions by working with the WHO.

The need for this was reinforced when, earlier this year the WHO published its Global Status Report on Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs). The report focuses on the four NCDs with high mortality: cancer, cardio-vascular,

diabetes and chronic respiratory, there is scarcely a mention of musculoskeletal conditions, or any other non-communicable disease with low mortality and high morbidity rates.

Despite this turn of events, there is some recognition by the WHO of the importance of musculoskeletal conditions and of the value of the **Bone and Joint Decades** global alliance. We have been invited to work with the WHO on several initiatives. This gives us the opportunity to influence the WHO, countries that are influential within the WHO, and countries that gain guidance from the WHO in developing their health policies and priorities.

Working with the WHO and policymakers in the new Decade

In recognition of the enormous and growing burden of non-communicable diseases the WHO held a high level UN Summit in New York in September 2011. Thirty four heads of state were present, together with health ministries from developed and less developed countries. The **Bone and Joint Decade** participated in this high level meeting and also the pre-meetings in Moscow and New York.

The result was a Political Declaration that acknowledges the four main non-communicable diseases as cancer, cardiovascular, diabetes and chronic respiratory and places strong emphasis on prevention as a means of controlling NCDs. As a result of the Political Declaration, Member States are expected to adopt policies to prevent and control NCDs on a national level.

It is a concern that the Political Declaration prioritises conditions with high mortality rather than those with high morbidity but low mortality, of which musculoskeletal conditions are a major contributor.

It is also a concern that the WHO does not wish to prioritise any other NCDs at present. From discussions with the WHO and national health policy makers, it is clear that there is a resistance to making any further specific conditions a priority.

There therefore remains much to be done to change this position.

In June 2011, the WHO launched the first World Report on Disability and this recognises the importance of loss of mobility and the limitations caused by musculoskeletal conditions, particularly in an ageing population. The **Bone and Joint Decade** participated in the launch of this ground-breaking report at the UN in New York and the WHO in Geneva

and has been invited to be a partner in its implementation.

The WHO has also launched the Decade of Action for Road Safety and a Global Alliance for the Care of the Injured. These two activities highlight the need for more effective prevention and management of injuries that impact musculoskeletal health. The **Bone and Joint Decade** has been invited by the WHO to be a core participant in the Global Alliance for the Care of the Injured, which gives us another opportunity to change the paradigm towards prioritising the prevention and control of conditions with high morbidity.

The WHO recognises the strength of the **Bone and Joint Decade** as an alliance for musculoskeletal health that brings together at national, regional and international levels all the relevant professional, scientific and patient organisations.

The **Bone and Joint Decade** will continue to work at an international and regional level to achieve recognition of musculoskeletal conditions as a health priority. This is essential to underpin and support advocacy at the national level; because it is only through the support of the nations that prioritisation for musculoskeletal conditions can be sustained. Our strength is in our network; together we can achieve our common goals.

With best wishes for a successful meeting,

Tony Woolf

Chair, International Coordinating Council Bone & Joint Decade 2010-2020