

Take heart: Don't let the disease control you



FOR 40 YEARS, the **Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados** has been leading the charge against heart disease and stroke, reminding Barbadians that prevention starts long before a hospital visit. The Foundation's mission remains clear: to help Barbadians live longer, healthier lives through small but powerful lifestyle changes.

Cardiovascular disease doesn't begin with a heart attack. Rather, it starts quietly in daily habits such as poor eating, lack of exercise and harmful lifestyle choices. Consultant Cardiologist and Head of the Department of Cardiovascular Services at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Dr Dawn Scantlebury, offered simple, yet profound advice: "Eat better, move more and care for your mental health." She recommends "eating as close to the earth as possible, avoiding processed foods, avoiding excess salt, sugar and fat, especially trans-fats. Eat mostly plants, whole grains and high fibre containing carbs. Make sure the plate is full of colour instead of brown and beige. Ideally, treat fast food as a rare treat rather than a routine. And don't smoke!"

But food alone is not enough. Physical activity is equally important for prevention. Scantlebury said, "Adults should have at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week or 75 minutes of vigorous activity. That means perhaps a 30-minute

brisk walk five days a week, or a couple speed walk/runs with strength training one day and yoga, or Taichi or Pilates. Take the stairs rather than the elevator or escalator, park further away from building entrances, and walk around a little after a meal." She adds that mental wellness is just as important saying, "Be kind – to yourself, your family, friends and co-workers. Avoid being judgmental. Forgive people. Forgive yourself and hug more."

Early detection is another cornerstone of the Foundation's approach, and Scantlebury stressed the importance of screening to catch silent risks early: "The **HSFB** is a keen advocate for screening to ensure early detection of hypertension, diabetes and high cholesterol, which with family history and smoking are the top risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Untreated, these conditions can lead to accelerated atherosclerosis (the development of cholesterol plaques in blood vessels, which then lead to heart attacks, amputations and strokes); heart failure; kidney disease – which also increases CVD risk. Prevention is key, so the earlier these conditions, which are often silent, are detected, the better."

To raise awareness, the Foundation reaches out through health fairs, radio campaigns, social media, and even bus shelters. And for more in-depth information, Dr Scantlebury encouraged visiting the Foundation's

website.

Medical science is constantly evolving, and the Foundation is committed to keeping pace. Scantlebury highlighted promising developments, including GLP1 agonists for obesity management and new drugs for cholesterol and diabetes control. However, cost remains a significant issue in Barbados, making lifestyle management and NCD prevention crucial. Beyond prevention, the Foundation also provides vital rehabilitation services. "Our founding programmes of CDP&R (cardiovascular disease prevention and rehabilitation) and ECC (emergency cardiac care training) are key to supporting individuals with heart disease and stroke. Rehabilitation services help patients with resuming a normal life and towards promoting a lasting lifestyle change," while the growing stroke rehabilitation programme has "assisted many patients in their journey to improved mobility and functioning post stroke." The Foundation also has ECC training which includes Heart Saver, Basic Life Support, ACLS and PALS, and Dr Scantlebury has a dream: "If you were to sustain a cardiac emergency, you would want to have an individual trained with CPR around. Our dream is to have at least one of those individuals in every household in Barbados."

Forty years on, the mission of the **Heart & Stroke Foundation** remains as relevant as



DR DAWN SCANTLEBURY, MEDICAL DIRECTOR CDP&R (FP)

ever. And for those newly diagnosed with cardiovascular disease, Scantlebury has this advice: "Take heart. Take your control back from the disease by taking an active role in the process. Ask questions. Understand your condition. Adhere to the plan of care as agreed upon between you and your doctor. You are only cheating yourself, no one else, if you don't. The foundation of CVD management is literally your lifestyle." (DT)



INVESTING IN HEALTHY FUTURES: 40 YEARS STRONG

Republic Bank warmly congratulates the **Heart & Stroke Foundation of Barbados** on 40 remarkable years of championing cardiovascular and stroke health across our island. We remain committed to supporting the Foundation's vital work in prevention, rehabilitation, and public awareness.

Here's to many more decades of saving lives, fostering wellness, and building a healthier Barbados together.

