Johannesburg, May 07, 2019 – Every year, 17 May is dedicated to World Hypertension Day (WHD), an initiative of the World Hypertension League (WHL) in association with the International Society of Hypertension (ISH). The purpose of WHD is to promote public awareness of hypertension and to encourage citizens of all countries to prevent and control this silent killer.

Hypertension is persistently raised blood pressure, a condition in which the force of the blood against the artery walls is too high. This causes the heart to work harder than normal, which is dangerous as it puts one at high risk for heart disease, strokes, kidney disease and even eye disease.

A study conducted by Wits scientists and peers in 2017 revealed that South Africa has the highest prevalence of hypertension in Southern Africa. It also has the largest number of people whose blood pressure is still not controlled, even whilst on treatment. ¹

Professor Michèle Ramsay of the Sydney Brenner Institute for Molecular Bioscience at Wits and Dr Osman Sankoh from the International Network for the Demographic Evaluation of Populations and Their Health (INDEPTH) published the ground-breaking study, which reported on the prevalence of hypertension in approximately 10,000 older people at six sites across sub-Saharan Africa.

The study assessed awareness and control of blood pressure and it revealed astounding results that there were stark differences in the prevalence, awareness, and control of high blood pressure in the cohort studied.

“Hypertension can lead to severe complications and increases the risk of heart disease, stroke and death. While there are some hypertension risk factors that cannot be controlled like age, family history and ethnicity, the idea is to focus on the risk factors that can be changed. Testing regularly so you know your numbers and adopting healthy lifestyle habits can help with managing hypertension and reduce the risk of developing the condition”, says Dr Miles Braithwaite, (Medical Therapeutic Area Head - Primary Care) at Novartis.

To avoid a hypertension diagnosis, adopt these healthy lifestyle choices:

**Maintain a healthy weight.** When it comes to hypertension prevention, your weight is crucial. It is important to have a talk with your doctor about the ideal weight for you.

Eat a balanced diet. Eating healthy foods can help keep your blood pressure under control. Get plenty of fruits and vegetables, and limit your intake of excess calories, fat, and sugar.

Reduce salt in your diet. Eating a low-sodium diet can help keep blood pressure at normal levels. You can cut back on your total salt intake by avoiding high-sodium packaged and processed foods and not adding extra salt to your meals.

Exercise regularly. Physical activity helps in preventing hypertension. Moderate exercise for about 30 minutes three times a week is a good start, however the more you exercise, the better.

Cut back on alcohol. Drinking too much alcohol can lead to high blood pressure. For women, that means no more than one drink a day, and for men, no more than two.

Monitor your blood pressure. Make sure that you have your blood pressure measured regularly, either by your doctor, at a local pharmacy by a healthcare professional or at home. High blood pressure often occurs with no symptoms, so only blood pressure readings will alert you that there is a problem.

“Measuring your blood pressure regularly is vital as it alerts you to your numbers and puts you at an advantage of getting treatment, should you be diagnosed with high blood pressure”, advised Braithwaite.

For this reason, Novartis, in collaboration with the South African Hypertension Society, is aiming to create awareness and educating people about hypertension and its risk factors. Dischem will be setting up testing stations at various malls around the country. The testing will be done for free and advice will be offered by healthcare professionals. The dates and venues for the different provinces will be confirmed in due course.

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