

Price of Pandemics

Part 3 – NCD Contributors

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Epidemics and pandemics are no strangers to Planet Earth. By way of reminder, the term *epidemic* technically refers to the widespread occurrence of an infectious disease in a community at one time. Although definitions seem at times to overlap, a *pandemic* can be defined as an epidemic that has spread over several countries or continents.

As languages tend to do over time, the meanings of both epidemics and pandemics have morphed to include non-communicable diseases or what the World Health Organization (WHO) calls NCDs—Referring to them as an epidemic.

The statistics are sobering. Although no specific “infectious organism” can be identified in an NDS epidemic, the actual death toll (to say nothing of quality of life) may equal or exceed those of the average influenza epidemic or even pandemic.

Indeed, NCDs make the largest contribution to mortality on Planet Earth, accounting for 60 percent of global deaths and overshadowing most epidemics and pandemics due to an infectious disease agent such as a virus. Data from 2015 report that NCDs alone accounted for 40 million of the 56 million global deaths. That represents a lot of funerals and a whole lot of bereavement.

What do non-communicable diseases include? Here are examples, the first six alone considered the leading causes of mortality worldwide:

- Cardio-vascular disease
- Stroke
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Tracheal, bronchus, and lung cancers
- Other cancers
- Diabetes
- Alzheimer’s and other dementias
- Et cetera

By 2030, NCDs are estimated to account for two of the top three leading causes of disability and death worldwide: unipolar depressive disorders, ischemic heart disease,

and HIV/AIDS. Estimates are that more than three-quarters of all NCDs occur in low and middle-income countries, making this a major cause of poverty and an urgent development issue.

Would you be surprised to learn that *obesity* is now listed as a non-communicable disease? The World Health Organization reports that more than one billion adults are overweight worldwide, with 300 million considered clinically obese. Some wonder why obesity itself is not being referred to as a pandemic. Maybe because Obesity is uncommonly listed as the cause of death on a certified death certificate even though it may have been a major contributor. Typically, one of the fifty or more diseases linked with obesity is cited. In England there is an emerging trend toward increased certification of obesity as a cause of death.

Generally, obesity is the result of lifestyle factors. For example:

- Eating high density, low quality refined and process foods; drinking sodas, sugary drinks, and beer or other alcoholic beverages; and failing to implement portion control, especially when “mindless grazing and snacking” has become a habit.
- Sleep deprivation that triggers hunger when the brain tries to signal that it is out of energy.
- Sitting too much with the lack of physical exercise critical to both the health of the brain and the body.
- Drinking too little water—thirst sensations begin to fall after about age 50—and eating for both hunger and thirst.

Did you know that as of 2020, WHO designates depression as the second leading disease on this planet? Over 350 million people worldwide suffer from depression. More than 50 percent of people who commit suicide suffer from major depression. Anxiety, a form of fear, is the most common mental health issue.

Are NCDs really noncommunicable human to human?

Interesting question. Likely the answer is ‘yes’ unless organisms such as viruses and bacteria also enter the picture. But are they communicable as *behaviors*?

Maybe. Just maybe!

According to Jim Rohn, you become the average of the five people with whom you spend the most time. That includes yourself, because you are the only person who will be with you over your entire lifetime. Your mindset, self-talk and lifestyle do impact YOU as you develop habits and repeat them largely subconsciously. You also influence whom you hang out with and they influence you, both at a conscious and a subconscious level. Over

time this can impact your beliefs and your choices of lifestyle behaviors. This has been shown especially true for happiness, smoking, health—and obesity.

Your best bet to avoid being part of an NCD epidemic or pandemic, is to create and live a longevity lifestyle. Embrace the researched components of health and wellness—and reduce your risk of being an NCD statistic!

Where do so-called “plagues” fit in with epidemics and pandemics? That’s in Part 4.