



## **Caribbean Wellness Day 2014 Statement**

**Dr. C. James Hospedales, Executive Director - CARPHA**

On this second Saturday in September, I am pleased to invite you to join with me in celebrating Caribbean Wellness Day 2014. As you may know, Caribbean Wellness Day is an annual event geared at increasing awareness and promoting activities to address the epidemic of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which continues to severely impact the health, economy and development of the Region.

Recognizing the threat posed by NCDs, in The Declaration of Port of Spain, CARICOM Heads of Government outlined key strategies to prevent, control and reduce NCDs through the life course. This includes the need to “increase physical activity in the entire population”, especially in the workplace.

In light of this, for Wellness Day 2014, CARICOM Member States turn their attention to the working population of our society, with the slogan, ***the heart of a productive workforce is a healthy workforce.***

It is noteworthy that a 2011 New York Times article cited the work place as a new source of rise in obesity. According to the article, a group of researchers reported that modern work tends to be more sedentary, requiring only light activity. You may agree that technological changes such as the Internet and email result in many employees being seated for longer hours, with less movement during work hours.

The Caribbean region has one of the highest rates of obesity in children and adults in the world. This can be attributed in part, to poor diets and a lack of physical activity, driven by profound changes in the way we live and play, with massive marketing of foods high in sugar, fats and salt; as well as several hours per day spent watching TV and playing video games.

In this regard, CARPHA declared July 2<sup>nd</sup> Caribbean Public Health Day and urged persons to ***Add Life to their Life***, by making one healthy lifestyle change. These changes include:

- Walking 30 minutes a day; it reduce your risk of heart attack by half
- Reducing your salt intake to reduce your risk of hypertension
- Eating five servings of fruit and vegetables each day to reduce your risk of hypertension, heart disease and cancer
- Not smoking to reduce your risk of cancer and wrinkles and save money
- Reducing your alcohol consumption
- Staying on your medications, If you have high blood pressure or diabetes, to avoid complications like heart attacks, stroke, and kidney failure

The British Journal of Cancer reported in 2008 that men who exercise often are less likely to die from cancer than those who don't. According to the report, a study conducted over a period of seven years, found that men who walked or cycled for at least 30 minutes a day had a 34 per cent lower risk of dying from cancer than the men who did less exercise or nothing at all.

Research Cancer UK also states there is evidence that a healthy lifestyle can prevent up to half of all cancers - and regular exercise forms a key part of this.

CARPHA acknowledges that although there is a high level of personal responsibility for individuals when it comes to their health, there is also a major responsibility for governments and also employers to create an environment that promotes healthy living. This being the case, CARPHA would like to call on employers, in particular, to seek innovative ways to put physical activities back into the work place.

This does not have to be a costly initiative as offices can be “redesigned” to encourage walking. Incentives can also be offered for employees to take the stairs rather than the elevator or even to bike to work or take walks during their breaks.

As employers, let us promote preventive care by providing annual physicals or regular screenings, wellness programmes and regular immunization for our employees, so that we are able to nip treatable diseases in the bud. By taking these seemingly small steps, we can and will begin to reverse the NCD trend.

So, as we celebrate Caribbean Wellness Day with activities such as health fairs, fitness walks, sports and games, dance marathons, healthy food promotions, and health education sessions, let us commit, as individuals and employers, to healthy lifestyle behaviours not just for one day, but through the life course.

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