

The Slovak Republic needs to improve health of the population

Life expectancy at birth has increased in the recent years in the Slovak Republic. However, it is still lower than in the rest of the western European countries. The structure of mortality is different from these countries.

Mortality from cardiovascular diseases has fallen in the recent years, but it is still a leading cause of death in the Slovak Republic, more than 50% people die due to cardiovascular complications. The Slovak Republic has very high mortality from coronary heart diseases in the European Union. Cardiovascular morbidity and mortality is associated with consumer lifestyle. Overweight or obesity, impaired fasting glucose or type 2 diabetes mellitus and also atherogenic dyslipidemia are often associated with poor eating habits and a lack of physical activity. Incidence of overweight and obesity or impaired fasting glucose and type 2 diabetes mellitus has increased in the recent years. Hypertension, stress and smoking are the other risk factors that accelerate atherosclerosis. Many patients are not diagnosed with type 2 diabetes mellitus, dyslipidemia or hypertension, and only a small portion of patients with these diagnoses are regularly managed. There are also regional differences in morbidity and mortality from cardiovascular diseases, their prevalence is higher in poorer regions of the country. Respiratory system diseases, digestive system diseases and also external causes of death are the frequent causes of mortality too. Oncological diseases are the second most frequent cause of death in the Slovak Republic, the mortality rate from these diseases has a rising trend. Cancer, unlike cardiovascular diseases, significantly shortens life expectancy. Many other diseases also lead to this. One of the most common causes of death, liver cirrhosis, which is mainly caused by alcohol consumption, reduces life expectancy. A goal of the health policy is not only to prolong life expectancy, but also to extend life without serious illness and with adequate quality of life.

Many civilisation diseases are caused by unhealthy lifestyle. Alcohol consumption and smoking are more prevalent in the Slovak Republic than in the western European countries. Drug abuse has also increased in the last decades. Smoking causes mainly diseases of the cardiovascular and respiratory tract, excessive drinking of alcohol causes liver diseases, digestive tract, psychiatric and neurological diseases. Excessive tobacco and alcohol abuse also increases the incidence of oncological diseases. Drug abuse causes many infectious, neurological and other serious diseases. Changes in the external environment could be associated with rising cancer mortality and morbidity.

Regional disparities and many socioeconomic factors also affect the structure of morbidity and mortality, which is higher in deprived rural regions. The highest mortality and shortest life expectancy is in the segregated Roma settlements, where almost all inhabitants live in very poor conditions.

Economic growth is associated with reduction in morbidity and increase in life expectancy, nevertheless, it is not the only factor that affects the health status of the population. Suitable lifestyle changes, healthier eating habits and increased physical activity are needed. Abstinence from alcohol, tobacco and drugs leads to decrease in morbidity and mortality of the population. And last but not least, environmental protection is also needed.

To reduce mortality, preventive programmes are needed in several fields of medicine. A goal is to prevent civilisation diseases, diagnosing the disease at the initial stage when effective treatment is possible. There is a need for national cardiovascular programme that will be effective, financially manageable, and available to all social groups as well as to all age groups of the population. We also need special programmes in other fields of medicine, for instance, oncological diseases, respiratory diseases, liver diseases, and so on. The national strategy for health improvement should include a ban on the promotion of alcohol and tobacco products.

Improving the health status of the Slovak population is a long-term process, but possible in the future. Governmental, medical and lay cooperation is needed with an adequate support of electronic and print media.

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