

A conversation with Dr. Marc Jaffe, March 23, 2018

Participants

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Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Dr. Marc Jaffe.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Dr. Jaffe of Resolve to Save Lives, an initiative of Vital Strategies, as part of its investigation into trans-fat regulation. Conversation topics included an overview of Resolve to Save Lives, its work to improve cardiovascular health, monitoring and evaluation of its work, and its allocation of funds.

Overview of Resolve to Save Lives

Dr. Tom Frieden, the former Director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), founded Resolve to Save Lives in September of 2017 with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, and Bloomberg Philanthropies. Resolve to Save Lives devotes approximately 20% of its resources to its work on preventing epidemics and approximately 80% to its work on improving cardiovascular health.

Organizational structure

Resolve to Save Lives is an initiative of Vital Strategies, an organization that addresses global health issues through a variety of programs. Resolve to Save Lives employs approximately ten core staff in the US, and eight consultants in India that work on Resolve's cardiovascular health programs.

Resolve to Save Lives collaborates with the World Health Organization (WHO), Johns Hopkins University, the CDC Foundation, the World Bank, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids' Global Health Advocacy Incubator, and various in-country implementing partners on its work to improve cardiovascular health.

Vital Strategies is primarily funded by philanthropic foundations and can receive support from donors and partners who share its strong commitment to building strong public health systems.

Work to improve cardiovascular health

Resolve to Save Lives believes that cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a relatively under-resourced public health issue compared to infectious disease, despite the significant death that occurs every year due to CVD. Its work on CVD involves rapid

implementation of effective, evidence-based strategies that are simple and scalable. It is currently involved with cardiovascular health programs in China, India, and Thailand and has signed agreements to work in Ethiopia, Turkey, Vietnam, and Latin America with goals of expanding support to a total of 10 countries.

Prioritization of program areas

Its three program areas within its work on CVD are hypertension (high blood pressure) control, sodium reduction, and elimination of trans-fat.

Most of the countries Resolve to Save Lives works with are interested in work on hypertension control, and many also choose to work on sodium reduction and/or trans-fat elimination. For example, India has prioritized trans-fat elimination, and China has prioritized sodium reduction. These choices may be due to the relative burden in that country, or due to the priorities of policymakers.

Hypertension control

Strategy

Resolve to Save Lives promotes the improved treatment of high blood pressure through a five-component strategy:

1. **Simple treatment protocols** – Resolve to Save Lives believes that effective hypertension control should be centered around a simple treatment protocol with specific medications, dosages, and steps to take if blood pressure is not controlled.
2. **Uninterrupted supply of medications** – Hypertension treatment can often be unnecessarily complex due to the number of various medications and dosages used. A specific and standardized treatment protocol would simplify the logistics of delivering medications to patients.
3. **Task-sharing** – Simplified hypertension treatment protocols should be disseminated to the health care team members, such as medical officers, nurses, pharmacists, and community health workers, so that patients are not solely reliant on physicians for care.
4. **Patient-centered services** – Adequate care for high blood pressure should be easily accessible and should not require traveling significant distances.
5. **Monitoring systems** – Health facilities and governments should regularly monitor progress on hypertension control and use the data to make adjustments to their treatment approach when necessary.

Work on the Global Hearts Initiative technical package

Resolve to Save Lives, along with several other public health organizations, helps with the development and implementation of the Global Hearts Initiative technical package led by WHO and CDC. The Global Hearts Initiative includes components that address the treatment of hypertension (HEARTS) and salt reduction (SHAKE). The HEARTS technical package provides an evidence-based toolkit for improving

cardiovascular health and includes hypertension treatment strategies as a core component. The SHAKE technical package provides an evidence-based toolkit for reducing salt consumption. Resolve to Save Lives provides funding for technical consultation from WHO and CDC to help countries implement components of the HEARTS and SHAKE packages, as well as work on the elimination of trans-fat. Its goal is to familiarize governments with processes for addressing CVD until they are able to assume financial and technical responsibility for improving cardiovascular health.

Work in India

Resolve to Save Lives will support the recently launched India Hypertension Management Initiative (IHMI) in a number of ways:

- **Implementation support** – Resolve to Save Lives has a small team of technical consultants, who will work with WHO, the Indian Council of Medical Research, and various national health organizations to facilitate the rollout of the IHMI across India.
- **Training support** – Resolve to Save Lives is supporting cardiovascular health officers in training Indian healthcare personnel and working with the Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on developing its hypertension treatment system.
- **Monitoring support** – Resolve to Save Lives is supporting supportive treatment supervisors in monitoring the performance of health facilities and offer helpful feedback.
- **Organizational support** – Resolve to Save Lives has supported conferences in five Indian states, in which Indian medical experts utilized information from the HEARTS technical package to form a consensus around what state-level hypertension treatment protocols should be. These conferences have been highly successful, as all five Indian states were able to form a consensus around a single hypertension treatment protocol for their state.

Sodium reduction

To promote reduced sodium in food, Resolve to Save Lives provides funding for technical experts to work with governments and non-governmental organizations on:

- **Identification of salt sources** – Resolve to Save Lives helps countries identify whether excessive salt consumption is occurring at restaurants, in the home, through processed foods, through staple foods, or through other sources. It also helps determine whether a safe low-sodium salt alternative, such as potassium chloride, can be used in the food supply.
- **Promotional campaigns** – Resolve to Save Lives helps countries conduct educational campaigns in schools and through media on the health risks of salt consumption.

- **Implementation of SHAKE technical package** – Resolve to Save Lives helps countries implement the SHAKE technical package, which was developed by WHO and provides policy and intervention recommendations for reducing salt intake.

Work in China

Resolve to Save Lives is beginning to assist China with reducing sodium intake, which is currently far above a healthy level. Some areas of China, such as Shandong province, have already created multifaceted programs to reduce sodium consumption.

Elimination of trans-fat

Trans-fat is an unhealthy additive that was introduced to foods as a stabilizing agent and cheaper replacement for butter or lard. Some countries have already eliminated trans-fat through legislation and collaboration with the food industry. Resolve to Save Lives helps countries eliminate trans-fat through:

- **Identification and measurement of trans-fat** – Resolve to Save Lives helps countries identify the primary sources of trans-fat by taking measurements of trans-fat in food and people. It disseminates the technology and teaches the skills required to measure trans-fat in human subjects by working with the CDC, one of only a few organizations that is experienced in performing these complex tests.
- **Policy and legislation advocacy** – Resolve to Save Lives advocates for country-level policy and legislation on trans-fat, such as mandating limits of trans-fat in foods or banning the use of trans-fat altogether. If legislation is enacted, Resolve to Save Lives also advocates for rigorous enforcement. The Global Health Advocacy Incubator, a program of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, provides Resolve with consulting services for policy advocacy work.
- **Implementation of WHO policies** –WHO develops policy recommendations for reducing trans-fat in a country’s food supply. Resolve to Save Lives works with WHO on the implementation of these trans-fat policies, providing technical resources and staff.
- **Relationship-building with private sector stakeholders** – Resolve to Save Lives works with the food industry to determine whether voluntarily accepted standards on use of trans-fat would be effective or if additional legislation would be necessary.
- **Public campaigns** – Resolve to Save Lives helps develop earned media strategies to educate the public and policy makers on trans-fat through various media.

Work in India

Resolve to Save Lives’ work on trans-fat elimination in India is still in an early stage. It is currently in discussions with officials from the Food Safety and Standards

Authority of India and has found that various high-ranking government officials share its interest in reducing the presence of trans-fat in India.

Monitoring and evaluation

Resolve to Save Lives' goal is to save 100 million lives, which would require hypertension control in 50 million people, sodium reduction in one billion people, and the elimination of trans-fat in one billion people. It has created a roadmap for achieving these long-term goals and monitors its progress on legislation, policy, and enforcement among more data-driven metrics relating to population-level health.

Data collection process

Certain pieces of data, such as the treatment protocols a nation is using, are simple to collect. However, Resolve to Save Lives is also interested in collecting information from administrative datasets, government-sponsored surveys, and lab tests.

Administrative data

One component of its system for monitoring progress on hypertension control involves gathering routine medical data from health facilities. However, it can sometimes be difficult to obtain administrative data from facilities without electronic information systems.

Surveys

Many nations, based on the WHO STEPS instrument, take a random sample of the population and administer a survey that tests for high blood pressure among other health-related issues. Resolve to Save Lives works to increase governmental capacity to conduct these health surveys, which do not occur often (every 3-10 years). It also encourages government-sponsored collection of data on sodium intake through, for example, urine tests.

Lab testing

Gathering data on trans-fat can be more difficult than for blood pressure or sodium intake, although researchers may be able to test for trans-fat in various foods. Testing human subjects for trans-fat may also be useful, although the technology used to conduct these tests is still relatively new.

Allocation of funds

Resolve to Save Lives' budget is allocated in a variety of ways, based mainly on the legal frameworks of target countries and partners. For example, Resolve to Save Lives supports efforts in China through partners including WHO, Project HOPE, and the Beijing Lisheng Cardiovascular Health Foundation.

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