

Cardiovascular
Disease in Europe:
**A Collaborative
Approach to
Improving Health
Literacy and Care**



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Executive summary and acknowledgements

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death in Europe, responsible for more than 10,000 lives lost every day.^{1,2} Yet despite such a high prevalence, lack of public awareness and gaps in understanding may be preventing those at risk from receiving life-saving interventions.³

Through the initiative **We Care For Every Heartbeat**, Daiichi Sankyo is committed to strengthening our understanding and raising awareness of holistic approaches to reduce the risk of CVD across Europe. We believe that healthcare can only be improved by bringing together like-minded, caring groups and individuals, who share our passion and commitment.

To improve health literacy and care for CVD, we believe a holistic approach to its prevention and management should be adopted. This should include a wide net of expert health-related professionals – who we call ‘halo health-related professionals’ – who are crucial in raising awareness of the many facets of CVD and who we believe should become an integral part of the multidisciplinary health and care team. We’re taking action to make this a reality by exploring how Daiichi Sankyo in Europe can help facilitate these conversations and bring together influential voices to drive real change.

We’d like to thank everyone who agreed to participate with special recognition to:



Joost Wesseling
European Nutrition for Health Alliance (ENHA)



Patricia Ramirez
Psychologist and social media influencer



Klara Fuchs
Sports scientist and social media influencer



Alexander Tiesenhausen
Psychologist, fitness coach and social media influencer



Lola Montes Salinero
Nutritionist and social media influencer

Introduction

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death in Europe. It is responsible for more than 10,000 lives lost every day.^{1,2} In 2020, more than 60 million people were living with CVD in the European Union, and close to 13 million new cases were diagnosed that year alone.⁴

Yet, despite such a high prevalence, lack of public awareness and gaps in understanding (as highlighted by our 2021 European Survey of CVD) may be preventing those at risk from receiving life-saving interventions.³ According to the World Health Organization, 80% of premature heart disease and stroke is preventable.⁵

The number of people who experience CVD in their life is expected to increase due to the ageing population as well as the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.^{6,7} The pandemic placed a significant burden on healthcare systems across Europe.^{8,9} Many hospitals postponed elective procedures, resulting in delays in the diagnosis and treatment of CVD, which can lead to poorer outcomes for patients.^{8,9}

Furthermore, a direct link between a Covid-19 infection and the onset of new CVD symptoms indicates that the increase in patient numbers will likely rise faster than previously anticipated.⁷

There is a growing emphasis on preventing and managing CVD through behavioural changes and risk factor management.¹⁰ This includes promoting healthy diets, physical activity, smoking cessation, reducing cholesterol and blood pressure control.¹⁰

However, there are significant disparities in CVD prevention and management across Europe, with some populations experiencing higher rates of disease and poorer outcomes than others.¹¹ This often relates to social determinants of health, such as income, education, and access to healthcare, as well as awareness about CVD, its risk factors and preventative measures.^{12,13}

A holistic approach

Through the initiative **We Care For Every Heartbeat**, Daiichi Sankyo is committed to strengthening understanding and raising awareness of holistic approaches to reduce the risk of CVD across Europe. We believe that healthcare can be improved meaningfully by bringing together like-minded, caring groups and individuals, who share our passion and commitment.

In this report, we explore the potential opportunities for collaboration with expert health-related professionals – who we call ‘halo health-related professionals’ – with expertise in nutrition, physical activity and mental health, to advance CVD health literacy, prevention and care in Europe. Our aim is to help improve outcomes for people with, or at risk of, CVD.



“Beyond the supply of our medicines, at Daiichi Sankyo we strive to support clinical communities and healthcare ecosystems across Europe to reduce the impact of CVD on the lives of people. **A holistic approach to CVD prevention and care requires a multidisciplinary team of experts which also includes professionals who focus on behavioural and physiological risk factors, such as diet, exercise and mental health.**”



Oliver Appelhans

Vice President Commercial Operations and Affiliate & Partner Management,
Daiichi Sankyo Europe

Health literacy and its role in CVD care

Health literacy is the ability of individuals to access, understand, evaluate and use information related to health and healthcare. It is a necessary requirement to make informed decisions about one's own health and well-being. Put simply, good health literacy has the ability to save time to proper treatment, reduce costs and save lives.¹²

Individuals with low health literacy may have difficulty understanding and following the recommendations of healthcare providers regarding behavioural changes, medication adherence, and monitoring of symptoms.¹⁴ This can lead to a low level of patient engagement, resulting in worse health outcomes and higher health services utilisation.¹⁴

Furthermore, low health literacy can contribute to significant health disparities, with certain populations, such as those with lower levels of education, income, and/or minority groups, being disproportionately affected.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

Patients with higher health literacy are more likely to be engaged in their own care, to communicate effectively with healthcare providers, and to make informed decisions about their treatment options.^{14,15}

Improving health literacy can therefore have a positive impact on the prevention, detection and care of chronic diseases, as has been shown in a number of different therapy areas, for example diabetes.^{17,18}

By providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and support they need to manage their CV condition effectively, patients are more likely to achieve better health outcomes and experience an improved quality of life.¹⁵ Additionally, we believe that by empowering patients to take an active role in their care, healthcare providers can improve communication and collaboration, leading to better overall care and well-being.

The impact of health literacy on risk factors for CVD

We believe health literacy can play a crucial role in addressing both behavioural and physiological risk factors for CVD.

- Among the most important behavioural risk factors of CVD are an unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, smoking and alcohol consumption.^{10,19}
- Physiological risk factors – which are also diseases in their own right – include high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol and atrial fibrillation.^{10,19,20}

The impact of mental health on CVD risk must also be more greatly acknowledged, as depression and anxiety can lead to unhealthy behaviours, such as smoking, poor eating habits and lack of treatment adherence.²¹ In addition, chronic stress can trigger physiological responses that increase blood pressure and heart rate.²¹

Understanding the importance of a healthy diet and knowing the benefits of regular physical activity are therefore of great importance, as these lifestyle choices or behavioural risk factors address physiological risk factors for CVD.¹⁰



To improve health literacy and care for CVD, a holistic approach to its prevention and management must therefore be adopted, with halo health-related professionals becoming an integral part of the multidisciplinary care team.

A collaborative approach to health literacy and care

Our goal at Daiichi Sankyo is to protect people from CVD and help those who suffer from it, so they can enjoy every precious moment that life has to offer. To achieve this, we need to work together with key contributors and a multifaceted network of experts, to address the challenges of CVD, help reduce CVD risk and contribute to improving CVD care in patients across Europe.

We need to look beyond general practitioners and cardiologists and include halo health-related professionals to ensure a holistic approach to CVD prevention, detection and care. *“We need to talk about nutrition, physical exercise, anxiety and stress management,”* says Patricia Ramírez, psychologist from Spain.

We firmly believe that we can help improve CVD health literacy by collaborating with and supporting the important work of nutritionists, physical health trainers and health psychologists. Whether this be through educational materials, online events, patient education programmes, or encouraging patient engagement – together, we can make a positive impact.



*“I think the **prevention of cardiovascular diseases through the execution of healthy habits is such an important message. We need to talk about nutrition, physical exercise, anxiety and stress management.** I often see scientific texts with lots of statistics, explanations, and technical terms. Because of that, people get overwhelmed. Texts must be short, easy to read, and easy to understand. Then it will easily reach people. And whoever is sharing the information must have credibility – both as a person and as a professional.*

*What I talk about is ‘everyday life’ psychology. To me, the daily life comprises eating healthy, physical activity, and sleeping. We relate food to social life, celebrations; we say life is short, you should be living in the moment, and that eating healthy is boring. **So, many people eat sugary, fried, salty food when they are nervous, anxious, bored, and then they get trapped in a vicious circle. This is where we need to provide a lot of information: what is considered healthy food, how to prepare healthy food without losing flavour, teaching people not to use food as a way to cover their emotions.***

*I think people must find a purpose to start exercising that truly speaks to them. Your motivation may be to lose weight, to strengthen self-esteem, or to be autonomous. **If people find their own motivations to exercise in the present, in the long run they will have better odds to avoid disorders related to stress, anxiety or other age-related vulnerabilities.***

*While it is necessary to raise awareness about what can happen to you in the future, people do not want to know about these long-term risks because it keeps them from enjoying the present. We must do a lot of outreach and work on the idea that this can really happen. We do not want to scare people, but mental and physical health is in our hands. We need to **motivate people to think about the rewards they will get from healthy habits in the present and not the negative consequences they might avoid in the future.**”*



Patricia Ramírez
Psychologist and social media influencer
Spain

Promoting a healthy diet

Eating a nutritionally balanced diet is key to reducing the risk of chronic conditions such as CVD.²² Dietitians (who are qualified health professionals that assess, diagnose and treat nutritional problems) and nutritionists (who are qualified to provide information about food and healthy eating) use an evidence-based approach to create nutritionally-sound healthy eating plans that help people achieve long-term optimal health.^{23,24} In partnership with their clients, they create bespoke dietary plans, while taking into consideration the client's personal lifestyle, metabolism, physical frame, dietary requirements, cultural beliefs and activity levels.²⁵ *“Even by making little changes in their diet, people can make large positive changes to their life,”* explains Lola Montes Salinero, nutritionist from Spain.



In addition to the impact on CVD prevention, dietitians and nutritionists can also support patients after an event such as a heart attack or stroke.²⁶ This can include identifying and addressing nutritional deficiencies, which can improve blood lipid profiles, and encouraging blood pressure management.²⁶

Dietitians and nutritionists also play a vital role in improving health literacy, by educating people on the importance of selecting nutritionally adequate and tasty foods to improve, and maintain, their health and well-being.²⁷ This knowledge can empower individuals to make long-term, healthier food choices.¹⁵

*“Cardiovascular health is very important and will become even more so both at the European and country levels. **We need to drive awareness around the importance of good nutrition and its impact on diseases, including CVD.***

*In general, there is a lack of communication between doctors and dietitians. Many doctors have little or no training in nutrition, so they don't adequately understand the need for early nutrition intervention. **Dietitians should play a bigger role in helping prevent CVD. We know the science; we know that nutrition intervention can make a difference.** The most difficult part is getting dietitians on the team that is managing patient care.*

*Dietitians should also be involved much earlier on in the process. With many treatments, ‘pre-habilitation’ is key. In the run up to an operation, for example, nutrition is very important because the patient's condition is crucial for the outcome. **There is also a key role for dietitians when the patient leaves the hospital and goes back into the community setting. Nutritional expertise and support can add great value, keeping track of the needs and well-being of the patient.***



Joost Wesseling
European Nutrition for Health Alliance



Motivation to be physically active

Exercise can help to improve heart function.²⁸ Being active can reduce an individual's risk of developing certain heart and circulatory diseases by as much as 35%.²⁹ People who engage in regular physical activity also tend to have lower blood pressure, better blood sugar regulation, and a more favourable plasma lipoprotein profile.²⁸ *“Everyone knows exercise is important. But they usually don't do it – they don't know where to start or how to keep going,”* says Klara Fuchs, sports scientist from Austria.

Physical health trainers can help raise awareness of the benefits of regular physical activity in reducing the risk of CVD.³⁰ Trainers can create and deliver safe and effective exercise programmes to improve long-term fitness and health, supporting individuals to engage in more physical activity and motivating them to make it a regular part of their lifestyle.³⁰ For patients that have suffered a CV event, physical health trainers create tailored exercise programmes that support their recovery and promote important lifestyle changes and sustained well-being.³¹



*“I want to help people to get moving, to get off the couch, because that is usually the hardest part. **Everyone knows exercise is important. But they usually don't do it – they don't know where to start or how to keep going. How can we get people to change their behaviour? How can we motivate them, so they want to exercise? There needs to be cooperation – together, we reach more people, more effectively.***

*Social media can be a very good channel for this, because you can reach lots of people and provide free content, with simple and clear directions, so that your audience know exactly what to do and want to follow it. You can especially encourage young people, who often are not so aware of heart health, to spread the message and look out for the older generation – get them to go for a walk with their grandma! **If we work together, we can create something for the whole community.***



Klara Fuchs
Sports Scientist and social media influencer
Austria

Understanding the impact of mental health

A growing body of evidence suggests that mental health, for example anxiety, is associated with key behavioural and physiological risk factors for CVD.^{21,32} Prolonged experiences of depression, anxiety and stress can lead to certain physiological effects on the body, such as increased heart rate and blood pressure, reduced blood flow to the heart, and heightened levels of cortisol.^{21,33} *“The way we respond to stress, the way we deal with emotions, has a huge impact on cardiovascular health,”* explains Alexander Tiesenhausen, psychologist from Austria. *“We just don’t make the connection between depression and heart health.”* Poor mental health can also contribute to lack of treatment adherence as well as poor lifestyle choices that impact physical health and well-being.²¹

Psychologists can help raise awareness and understanding of the connection between mental health and CVD risk factors, management and care.³⁴

Psychologists work with individuals to improve their mental health, providing coping strategies and self-care practices to help them adhere to healthier long-term behaviours.³⁵ Through their professional training and honed skills, they try to help patients with CVD accept lifestyle changes, and deal with any setbacks that may impact on their ability to achieve optimal health and well-being in the long-term.³⁵



“I believe there is a significant correlation between heart health and mental health. The way we respond to stress, the way we deal with emotions, I think has a huge impact on cardiovascular health. But I don’t think there is a holistic approach for CVD. I think that everyone is focused on their own field of expertise. So, psychologists don’t always talk to their clients about CVD, and cardiologists don’t often talk to their patients about mental health. We usually don’t make the connection between depression and heart health.”

I think one piece of the puzzle that is often overlooked is helping people change their lifestyle. Someone is told to exercise three times a week, but not many have the self-discipline to stick to this routine. We need to have more psychological interventions on how to implement the necessary changes and deal with the emotions of a CVD diagnosis.”



Alexander Tiesenhausen
Psychologist and fitness coach
Austria



Halo health-related professionals: opportunities to improve health literacy and care

Halo health-related professionals, such as nutritionists, physical health trainers and health psychologists, can have a unique opportunity in improving health literacy and CVD awareness across Europe. By supporting key messages shared by general practitioners, cardiologists and policymakers, halo health-related professionals can add new insights and tactics, providing a holistic perspective to help that message resonate with their clients and with patients.

Halo health-related professionals, and especially those with a significant social media presence, can play a key role in spreading information about CVD risk factors and prevention to an even wider audience. Being experts in their fields, and having built a community with their followers, they are likely to be respected as a trusted source of reliable information for many people that traditional communications channels may not reach. *“I often see scientific texts with lots of statistics, explanations, and technical terms. Because of that, people get overwhelmed. Texts must be short, easy to read, and easy to understand. Then it will easily reach people. And whoever is sharing the information must have credibility – both as a person and as a professional,”* explains Patricia Ramírez, psychologist and influencer from Spain.

The personal connection influencers have developed with their followers can help people connect with and better understand the messages about risk factors and the impact of CVD and motivate them to make lifestyle changes to live healthier lives.

Furthermore, by sharing facts and stories about CVD and its risk factors, halo health-related professionals can play a crucial role in supporting the earlier detection and prevention of CVD. Through active collaboration with clients, patients and healthcare professionals alike, they can help identify risks, and support or lead interventions that can help people care for their heart and reduce their risk of experiencing a CV event, such as a heart attack or stroke.



“Practitioners specialising in different areas working together can really enrich the way people are treated and cared for. For CVD, we need a lifestyle-changing approach. Social media can play an important role, because nowadays this is where people look for information. My followers trust me and listen to my advice. By making little changes in their diet, people can make positive changes to their life and health. To help health influencers reach more people, we need support for activities like social media campaigns, podcasts, eBooks, and online master classes.”



Lola Montes Salinero
Nutritionist and social media influencer
Spain

Summary

A truly holistic approach to prevention and care of CVD integrates halo health-related professionals, which includes experts and practitioners from various relevant disciplines:

- Nutritionists can provide personalised dietary advice that can help individuals manage risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and atrial fibrillation.²⁶
- Physical health trainers can design exercise programmes tailored to individuals' needs, preferences, and limitations, which can help improve cardiovascular health, reduce risk factors, and enhance overall well-being.^{30,31}
- Psychologists can help patients manage the emotional impact of CVD and develop strategies to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, which can worsen physiological risk factors, and help individuals adhere to long-term behaviours.^{34,35}

Improving health literacy will help people make more informed decisions about their lifestyle choices, reduce their risk of developing CVD and help in CVD management and care.^{14,15} By contributing to improvements in health literacy, we believe that halo health-related professionals can empower individuals to take control of their health and make positive, long-lasting behavioural change.

We are committed to working with halo health-related professionals to improve collaboration and conversations between each profession and healthcare providers to ultimately inspire new holistic approaches to CVD care. We're taking action to make this a reality by exploring how Daiichi Sankyo in Europe can help facilitate these conversations and bring together influential voices to drive real change.

“By working together with halo health-related professionals, we can improve health literacy to address the behavioural and physiological risk factors of CVD, with the aim of improving patient care and outcomes.”



Oliver Appelhans
Vice President Commercial Operations and Affiliate & Partner Management,
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