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2011 is the year of chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The United Nations General Assembly will hold a Special Session on NCDs in September 2011 to galvanize the global community to address the scourge of NCDs, which is on the rise even in sub-Saharan Africa, the only region of the world where NCDs are not yet the leading cause of death. The countries and communities of sub-Saharan Africa are heterogeneous in terms of stage of economic development and their position in the epidemiologic transition from diseases of famine and pestilence (associated with poor socio-economic status) to diseases of affluence and plenty (associated with advanced economic development). Contrary to conventional wisdom, NCDs are as relevant to poor countries and communities as they are developed countries and wealthy communities.

This book by Dr. Gene Bukhman and his colleagues from Partners In Health at Harvard University in Boston is timely and represents a unique achievement in the manner in which it addresses politicians, health planners, policy makers, and clinicians with clear messages that are relevant and feasible in resource-poor settings. The first chapter on the integration of chronic care services in Rwanda deals with the central ingredient for success in developing services for NCDs—which is to build on existing services for communicable diseases and to extend them to achieve full coverage for all health conditions. It is followed by chapters on Palliative Care and Chronic Care (Chapter 2) and the Role of Community Health Workers, Family Planning, Mental Health, and Social Services (Chapter 3). These first three chapters are essential reading for senior officials in the Rwandan Ministry of Health and for all managers of health services and clinical leaders.

The last seven chapters of the handbook are aimed at the clinician who practices at all levels of care. The information contained in these sections highlights the unique epidemiology of NCDs among the “bottom billion” of the poorest people in the world. The information in these sections will be of great interest to all students and practitioners of the emerging field of global health.

This handbook is a model for the development of integrated services for NCDs in Rwanda. I look forward to the adaptation of this model to other

countries, and to the assessment of its impact on quality of care and health outcomes where it is used.

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