

The obesity pandemic



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In the UK we are constantly being reminded by the media that we have a growing obesity problem. I was surprised to learn quite recently however that the UK now has the highest obesity rate in Europe. Furthermore, it is estimated that approximately 1 in every 5 UK adults are overweight, and approximately 1 in 15 clinically obese.

Despite this however, it is still the perception of many people here in the UK that obesity is a bigger problem in other countries. We have all seen the rise of this pandemic in the US in particular, but the figures show this has now reached our own doorstep. In fact, research tells us that the US and UK have had the highest prevalence of obesity over the past 20 – 40 years and it is highly likely that this trajectory will continue until 2030.

Finding these figures fascinating and after doing some further research however, I found to my surprise that it is in fact Qatar which has been labelled ‘the obesity capital of the world’, with over half the population overweight. Half of all adults in the state are classed as obese and 17% are suffering from

diabetes, making it the most overweight country in the world. However, the problem is a massive regional issue as well as 35% of women in the UAE are classified as obese and in Bahrain they have the highest rate of childhood obesity in the Middle East.

Diabetes, cardiovascular disease and various cancers are the main chronic diseases associated with obesity. The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) recently stated that the issue of diabetes is a growing problem in the Middle East and North Africa regions, with the number of people suffering from the disease expected to double in less than 20 years.

Figures released by the IDF show that the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes in the region for younger age groups is substantially higher than the global average. An unhealthy combination of low levels of exercise and a growing popularity of fast food outlets have been blamed for this increase.

Medical costs associated with the treatment of obesity-related conditions are enormous and only likely to grow in size. With patient numbers increasing, there is the potential for a large and unsustainable drain on resources. Complications such as foot ulceration, heart disease, nephropathy and retinopathy are very serious risks for patients, as well as being very costly to treat. So what can be done?

There is a need for governments around the world to educate and inform populations of the risk of eating badly and not taking exercise. Modifying lifestyle factors can often prevent obesity, and in order to avoid a healthcare crisis, they need to spread information that highlights the importance of doing just that.

The Qatari government hopes that the development of sport in the country, through hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022, will help boost interest in exercise and outdoor pursuits.

Although losing the bid to host the 2020 Olympic Games, the Qatar Olympic Committee has launched public programmes administering free body-mass indexes and sugar level tests, material about healthy eating, and introduced initiatives to schools to help children learn about ‘new’ sports such as handball and tennis.

The World Health Organisation predicts that by 2015 an incredible 700 million adults will be classified as obese. How best to target preventative measures is clearly an important public health priority that both governments and individuals need to take on board or the consequential financial effects on health budgets could be considerable for many years to come. Starting the ball rolling here, I’m off for a brisk walk and a salad lunch! **MEH**

Durbin PLC is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established in 1963, the company specialises in supplying quality assured pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and consumable supplies to healthcare professionals and aid agencies in over 180 countries. As well as reacting rapidly to emergency situations, Durbin PLC responds to healthcare supply needs from local project level to national scale programmes.

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