

A Weighty Issue

Dr Noel CARUANA

This edition of Maltese Family Doctor focuses on the issue of diabetes and the epidemic of obesity. Unfortunately, because of the toxic environment we are designing for ourselves, an ever increasing proportion of our population is becoming more sedentary and is exposed to an energy rich, refined food diet which favours obesity.

Reading through data, relating to obesity and type 2 diabetes, is concerning for a number of reasons. Being obese or overweight is related to a number of diseases notably type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis, psychological disorders, sleep apnoea and even social stigma. What is more worrying is that this phenomenon is likely to soar in the future as current generations of overweight children reach an obese adulthood.

What can we do as family doctors? We should be playing a key role in early identification of overweight children and adolescents. As an academic body and as professionals we should be advocating more for a healthier diet and less glorification of junk food in the media and adverts. Recommendations for adults are to measure body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference annually, especially in those individuals who appear overweight.

Behavioural change can be very difficult to achieve and we must go beyond merely stating “you should lose weight, because your BMI is high”. We must advise and explain the benefits of reducing weight, we must assist, by providing a “physical activity prescription” so the patient can develop a strategy that makes him/her lose weight. We also must arrange follow up and motivate regularly as needed.

In this issue Dr Philip Sciortino and Dr Renzo De Gabriele pay tribute to our colleague Dr Saviour Cilia whom we tragically lost earlier this month. He was a genuine family doctor and an inspiration to us all.

Being present at the inauguration of the new Mater Dei Hospital allowed me to fathom the mammoth task it has been for the Health and Finance Departments to organise the various processes involved. As mentioned by the guest speakers at the inauguration, having the latest technology in the world, alone is not enough to make sick people feel better. Medicine is also, and perhaps primarily, an art, besides a science. Investing in your manpower, not merely by raising their pay, is a very bold and yet necessary task that needs to be taken up urgently as it needs to follow the enormous leap we will be experiencing in hospital inpatient care set up. Healthcare in Malta has been traditionally, a show of solidarity, and yet human nature and the laws of economics dictate that necessary checks are in place to ensure equity and sustainability of the system. It has been officially acknowledged



that now that the Tertiary Health structure has been put in place through the building of the Mater Dei Hospital, the government will now focus some of its energy on the resuscitation of the primary care sector after many years of emargination. It is hoped that a wide consultation process will ensure a just system which will redress the current situation for the benefit of all concerned. Regardless of the difficulties we are facing, it is important that when Maltese are hospitalised, they want their family doctors involved and that we, their family doctors strongly believe we need to be present to ensure continuity and high quality of care.

A step in the right direction is the launching of the Specialist Training programme for Specialists in family medicine. The selection process is finally over and eleven Trainees will be commencing their training early this summer for the next three years, a process that will culminate in them being conferred the title of Member of the Malta College of Family Doctors (MMCFD).

Dr Noel CARUANA MD MSc MMCFD

Specialist Family Doctor,

Editor, Maltese Family Doctor

Honorary Secretary, Malta College of Family Doctors

Email: noelcaruana@gmail.com