



WORLD DIABETES DAY 2004

Fight Obesity Prevent Diabetes

Leaders in the field of diabetes and obesity have joined forces to call for stronger action to combat obesity as the key to the prevention of type 2 diabetes.

Prof Claude Bouchard, IASO president, endorsed the message launched by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) President-Elect, Prof Martin Sillink, President-Elect, under the slogan: "Fight Obesity Prevent Diabetes".

Marked on November 14, World Diabetes Day is the primary global diabetes awareness campaign, aimed at informing the public, professionals, policy makers and the media about the strong link between overweight, obesity and diabetes.

Prof Bouchard said that as well as the individual's responsibility to adopt a healthy lifestyle, it was a responsibility of policy makers worldwide to ensure safe exercise environments, safe transport to and from school or work by foot and bicycle, and promotion of healthy food such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains. It is already late but policy makers, business communities and individuals can join forces to fight obesity and prevent diabetes, he added.

IASO president-elect Arne Astrup, joint editor of the IDF-IASO publication, *Time To Act Diabetes and Obesity*, launched in May, said: "There may be a time lag between the increasing prevalence of obesity the onset of type 2 diabetes among susceptible individuals, but for overweight and obese children we are seeing increasing examples of the onset of type 2 diabetes at a tender age. It is not so long ago that type 2 diabetes was considered to be a risk factor only in later years."

The global press briefing to prime the media and focus attention on the issue was chaired by IDF Vice President Professor Rhys Williams. The initiative is the latest in a series of conjoint actions by the IDF and IASO, after a formal liaison arrangement was confirmed last year. The IASO's International Obesity TaskForce contributed an article, maps and data for the IDF's *Global Atlas of Diabetes* published in 2003, as well as chapters in the *Time To Act* publication.

Obesity and type 2 diabetes are now twin health threats throughout the world. With up to 1.7 billion adults at an increased risk of weight-related non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, overweight and obesity, the main modifiable risk factors for type 2 diabetes, increasingly affect children and adolescents.

The message of the IDF campaign is a simple one: lifestyle changes such as eating a healthy diet and being physically active are effective in delaying and, in many cases, preventing the onset of type 2 diabetes, and reducing the risk of developing complications in people with diabetes. It is estimated that at least half of all cases of type 2 diabetes could be prevented if weight gain in adults could be avoided.

The IDF said individual actions were not sufficient to halt the current epidemic and a concerted effort was required by health professionals, policy makers, and the private sector to reduce the overall level of risk in the world's population. This can be achieved through the promotion and implementation of environmental policies (in areas such as health, transport, agriculture and finance) that encourage healthy living from an early age. Decision-makers need to understand the huge social and economic consequences to the individual and society of the increasing diabetes and obesity epidemics.

The World Health Organization issued a supporting message stating: "There is solid evidence that obesity is now one of the most significant risks to global health. The obesity epidemic is

well documented in developed countries. Although there is less information from developing countries, emerging data indicate a similar pattern of increasing prevalence of obesity within a relatively short period of time."

In the World Health Report 2002, WHO estimated that obesity and physical inactivity contribute at least two-thirds of the burden of type 2 diabetes. The WHO message notes: "By controlling obesity we can contribute significantly to preventing diabetes, a result that also benefits those with the condition, as it leaves health systems better able to cope with a smaller number of people with diabetes,".

"Until now, the public health approach to overnutrition and physical inactivity has largely been based on emphasizing the need for individuals to change their behaviour. Whilst well meaning, this approach has not been sufficient to address the challenges we face and it has become clear that a different and global response is necessary in the face of this worldwide epidemic.

"A coherent policy framework encompassing legislation, regulation and education is necessary to create environmental changes that allow and encourage people to make healthy choices. At the request of its member states, the World Health Organization has developed the *Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health*. The next step is the development of a framework for implementing the strategy in different countries according to their needs."

World Heart Day focus on overweight children

Childhood obesity was one of the key issues highlighted on World Heart Day on September 26th. The World Heart Federation, with support from the International Obesity TaskForce, warned that overweight children are three to five times more likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke before they reach the age of 65.

The WHF issued a statement noting that youngsters are increasingly adopting unhealthy lifestyles and the leading causes of heart disease and stroke, obesity, poor diets, smoking and physical inactivity, are now being seen at an alarmingly early age.

The IOTF also issued a statement backing World Heart Day's focus on Children, Adolescents and Heart Disease (available in the media section of www.iotf.org).

WHF President, Professor Poole-Wilson, said World Heart Day encouraged people to lead a healthier lifestyle by taking more physical exercise and reducing the risk of heart disease through smoke-free living, healthy nutrition and weight control.

"We also call on governments to get involved and adopt and implement policies which will work to reduce the risk factors for heart disease and stroke," he added.

The WHF also expressed concern about smoking with almost half of all the children worldwide being subjected to passive smoke.

More information can be found on www.worldheart.org