

PLENARY 9

Obesity as New Generation NCD

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The prevalence of overweight and obesity has reached epidemic proportions, inflicting more than half of the adult Malaysian population. However, it is currently recognized as a lifestyle problem, a nutritional crisis, and merely an imbalance between energy consumption and physical activity. There is an urgent need to acknowledge and recognize obesity as a chronic, progressive, and chronically debilitating disease. Its underlying pathophysiology and pathogenesis are complex, largely attributed to unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyles, but also contributed to by a multitude of hormonal dysregulations and medication side effects. As Malaysia continues to maintain its position as the fattest nation in the South Asia region, we have to accept the fact that preventing obesity is no longer the focus, and it is, in fact, a losing battle. However, the main point of discussion now should be on recognizing obesity as a disease, a significant medical condition that shares similar metabolic abnormalities as the more established noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular disease (CVD), diabetes, and cancer. The joint WHO-Malaysian Ministry of Health report on “Direct Health-care Cost of Noncommunicable Diseases in Malaysia” demonstrated that 76.5% of Malaysians aged 60 and above have at least one NCD, and that NCDs remain the largest contributor to premature mortality in Malaysia. Therefore, a change in mindset in viewing obesity as a disease is pivotal to curb its growing prevalence and its related complications. Healthcare providers (HCPs) should be comfortable to address obesity, detect, diagnose, and subsequently treat the disease. Obesity management is the responsibility of all parties, which should be initiated at the primary care level, to include the community via social and religious groups. Partnerships between private and public sectors, relevant stakeholders (including insurance companies, the financial sector), patient advocate groups, are some of the areas to be explored, with a uniting objective to ensure the delivery of effective patient-centric, easily accessible, affordable treatments.

Keywords: Obesity, Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), Chronic disease, Malaysia, Healthcare providers, Obesity management, Partnership.

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