

EDITORIAL

The metabolic challenge of obesity: impact of weight management on improvement of metabolic risk factors. A one-day symposium held in April 2002

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It is only 40 y since obesity was recognized as a disease, and still today some question its status. Consequently, it is perhaps not surprising that most doctors practising today have never been taught about the dangers of obesity and how to manage it. We also have a remarkable paucity of obesity management centres within Europe and elsewhere. It is not surprising, therefore, that doctors are often as unrealistic as their patients in their expectations of weight management. Too often they set goals based on an ideal body weight, becoming disillusioned with their patients when they fail to achieve it rather than suggesting a more realistic but still clinically relevant target.

What is no longer in doubt is that we are living in the midst of an epidemic of obesity. Obesity is now the major nutritional disorder facing Western nations; the World Health Organization has declared it the biggest unrecognized public health problem facing society today.¹

Current research is beginning to unravel the complex pathophysiology of obesity, particularly central obesity, and this is leading us more and more to conclude that there is no single or simple solution to the weight management of our patients.

Nevertheless, we are now also beginning to understand much more clearly the enormous impact that obesity has on health outcomes and the integral link between excess weight and serious metabolic and cardiovascular diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and, more recently, end-stage renal failure. The issue remains how to convince our colleagues in other specialties that now we all have to consider obesity as a major medical problem that requires active management.

The manuscripts contained within this supplement to the *International Journal of Obesity and Related Metabolic Disorders* are based on presentations made at the Abbott European Obesity Symposium entitled, 'The Metabolic Challenge of Obesity: Impact of Weight Management on Improvement of

Metabolic Risk Factors' held on 13 April 2002 in Prague, Czech Republic.

The symposium comprised four sessions. The first session highlighted the magnitude of the problem and of the burden of disease accounted for by obesity, and considered the latest developments in our understanding of the neurophysiological control of energy balance, and of the activity of adipose tissue in this process.

The second session looked at the impact of obesity on diabetes and on two important end organs, the kidney and the heart.

In the third session, speakers reviewed the convincing evidence of the importance of moderate weight loss and of how pharmacotherapy can help us to achieve it by complementary approaches based on diet and exercise regimens. There was also an update on how sibutramine works and the metabolic benefits it can provide.

The fourth session considered the cardiovascular effects of sibutramine. This session was particularly relevant in the light of the recent review of the cardiovascular risk/benefit profile of sibutramine by the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products.

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Reference

- 1 WHO. *Obesity: preventing and managing the global epidemic. Report of a WHO Consultation*, WHO Technical Report Series, no. 894. WHO: Geneva, 2000.