



## Diabetes epidemic could cripple healthcare budgets across Europe

Europe's growing diabetes epidemic could cripple healthcare budgets in coming decades, warns Professor Martin Silink, President-elect of the International Diabetes Federation.

More than 53 million Europeans (or 8.4% of the adult population) currently suffer from diabetes. This is expected to rise to 9.8% by 2025. Developed countries are spending about 10% of their health budget on diabetes, but the incidence of the disease is increasing at a rate of 7 million new cases each year. According to Professor Silink, speaking at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting

of the European Association for the Study of Diabetes in Copenhagen, 'Healthcare budgets will just not be able to cope.'

Reported prevalence rates for diabetes in Europe range from 2% in Iceland to 11.8% in Germany. While the prevalence rates in Eastern and Western Europe are similar, the International Diabetes Federation believes that Eastern European countries are at higher risk of experiencing disruption to their economies as a result of the diabetes epidemic.

*Reuters, 13 September 2006*

## Gene identified that can double the risk of developing diabetes

Risk of developing type 2 diabetes can be doubled for people carrying two copies of the gene TCF7L2, according to research published in the *Journal of Molecular Medicine*. A study of 2676 European men also found that carrying one copy of the gene increased risk of type 2 diabetes by 50%. The study lasted for 15 years, and further research found that Indian and Afro-Caribbean patients were at the same risk.

According to Professor Steve Humphries, lead researcher from University College London Centre for Cardiovascular Genetics, 'Although being overweight is the major risk factor for developing diabetes, it is now becoming clear that an individual's genetic makeup has a big impact on whether or not they are going to develop diabetes.'

*BBC News, 23 October 2006*

## Rate of GP registration of people with diabetes soaring

More people in England were registered with their GP as having diabetes in 2005–6, compared with the previous year. Figures released by the Information Centre for Health and Social Care reveal that the number of people registered with diabetes rose from 1 766 391 (3.3% prevalence) to 1 890 663 (3.6% prevalence).

Health Minister, Lord Warner, commented that, 'Extra advice and support offered to patients [now diagnosed] on prevention

will save people from potentially life-threatening conditions and will reduce demands for emergency hospital care.'

Other statistics released show that GP practices are achieving 96% of the total target Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) points, up from 91% last year. This means that the average practice is now receiving £125 900 from the QOF system, costing the NHS £1 billion in total.

*The Times, 29 September 2006*

## Constituent of red wine can reverse the effects of high-fat diet

A compound which is found in red wine can reverse the effects of a diet high in fats, according to a report in the journal *Nature*.

In a study, mice were split into three groups and given either a normal diet, a high-fat diet or a high-fat diet with resveratrol.



Resveratrol can mimic the positive health benefits of a low-calorie diet, and is produced by grapes and some other plants.

Giving resveratrol reduced the risk of death in the high-fat diet

group by 31%, to about the same level as that seen in the normal diet group.

After 114 weeks of the study,

58% of mice in the high-fat diet group had died, compared with 42% in the normal diet and high-fat diet with resveratrol groups.

David

Sinclair of Harvard Medical School, who led the research, commented that the mice receiving resveratrol were also leading a more active life.

*The Times, 2 November 2006*

## RNIB warns people with obesity that their sight is at risk

The Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) is warning people with obesity that they risk losing their eyesight.

'Sight is the sense we most fear losing,' said Barbara McLaughlan, an eye consultant at the RNIB. She

added, 'With a staggering one in five adults and children in the UK now considered to be obese, RNIB believes it is vital that people are made aware of the risks to their sight.'

*BBC News, 5 September 2006*

## Chinese medicine may help people with type 2 diabetes

Berberine, a traditional Chinese medicine found in the roots and barks of some plants, may be beneficial for people with type 2 diabetes.

According to a study published in the journal *Diabetes*, berberine has been found to reduce blood glucose levels, circulating fat levels and the body weight of mice and rodents.

Chinese medicine literature documents that berberine is able to lower glucose levels in

people with diabetes. Berberine is found in many plants, including goldenseal, the Oregon grape and barberry. It has been used by a number of different cultures for medicinal purpose, usually to treat diarrhoea.

Professor David James of the Garvan Institute in Sydney, Australia commented that more human studies of berberine are required.

*BBC News, 12 August 2006*

## Pharmacists with special interest proposed by government

Pharmacists with special interest are going to be working in areas such as diabetes, heart disease and sexually transmitted diseases from next summer. The Department of Health announced that, following additional training, pharmacists will be able to hold specialist diabetes clinics.

Dr Richard Vautrey of the British Medical Association GPs committee said, 'We need to make sure there is very clear communication between these new expert pharmacists and the patients' GP.'

*BBC News, 4 September 2006*

## Compensation after hospital fails to diagnose diabetic ketoacidosis

Compensation has been paid to a man whose wife died in hospital after her diabetic ketoacidosis was not diagnosed. Wendy Smith was admitted to Newark General Hospital four years ago, but died 2 weeks later after tests and treatment had been delayed for 22 hours.

The hospital's Trust commented that, after detailed investigations, it accepted that there was a delay in a doctor diagnosing diabetic ketoacidosis. It stated that a locum

doctor had not appreciated the severity of her condition, but that consultants were now based at the hospital on a permanent basis.

Mr Smith's solicitor commented: 'on admission, if someone had read her notes carefully, she could have been admitted to intensive care. Medical evidence we obtained suggests that if that happened, this 42-year-old lady would still be with us today.'

*BBC News, 29 August 2006*

## Worldwide obesity problem fuelled by changes in Chinese lifestyle

Obesity in China is increasing at an alarming rate, with 15% of the population now being overweight. According to the *BMJ*, the problem of obesity in children in China has increased 28-fold in the past 15 years.

An increasingly affluent and urban lifestyle, greater meat consumption, increased car use and reduced exercise are all implicated in the changes. Energy intake from animal sources has increased dramatically: from 8% in 1982 to 25% in 2002. There are 20 million cars on the road today, compared with just 6 million in 2000. Over 180 million Chinese are now thought to be overweight.

'China was once considered to have one of the leanest populations in the world, but it is fast catching up with the west,' commented Wu Yangfeng of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences in Beijing.

Tony Barnett, from Birmingham University, UK, noted that the

changes have been incredibly dramatic. He said, 'I think we are seeing this in virtually every country in the world. Interestingly, it is not just the developed world, but increasingly it's the developing world as well.'

Commenting on social attitudes to excess weight, Professor Wu said, 'In Chinese culture there is still a widespread belief that excess body fat represents health and prosperity. This is perhaps a consequence of China's recent history, where famine and chronic malnutrition caused the deaths of millions of people.'

The International Association of Agricultural Economists conference in Australia recently heard that there are now more overweight than undernourished people in the world. It is estimated that there are 800 million people who are undernourished, while over 1 billion are overweight.

*Guardian, 18 August 2006*

## DIABETES LITE

### Diabetes – a relative problem!

Labour MP for Norwich North Ian Gibson caused outrage among his constituents when he suggested that high rates of diabetes in Norfolk were caused by inbreeding. 'There is an inbreeding complex in villages – people inter-marry with many not leaving the

county.' Dr Gibson also said, 'If you look at the names in Norfolk, there are a lot that are the same.'

Dr Gibson, subsequently issued an unreserved apology for his comments.

*Guardian, 11 August 2006*

### Fat fighter protected by his layers of lard

Being overweight is linked to increased disease and premature death, but one man claims that 'being very fat' helped save him during a recent knife attack. David Jeffries-Tipton, 41, was stabbed eight times during an

altercation at a party. Mr Jeffries-Tipton, who did not even realise that he had been stabbed, said, 'I really didn't realise it was so bad. I think it's because I'm so fat – it cushioned the blows.'

*Metro, 4 September 2006*

### Army recruits XL battalion

Obesity is no longer a barrier to joining Britain's elite, professional armed forces. With a shortfall of 5170 soldiers in the British Army, rules have been relaxed to aid recruitment. With too many military hopefuls being ruled out by their waistlines, the army has increased the maximum body mass index

from 30 to 32kg/m<sup>2</sup>. This follows research that only 33% of all 16-year-olds would pass under the previous admission standards.

With an emphasis on quick marching, will the army be able to win its own Battle of the Bulge?

*The Independent, 3 November 2006*

