

# Report

## World Diabetes Day

14 November 2007

### Spotlight on diabetes

To mark the occasion of the first United Nations observed World Diabetes Day, many of the world's iconic landmarks lit up the skyline in the blue circle, the global symbol for diabetes.

The campaign has been joined by some of the world's most famous landmarks, including the Empire State Building, Sydney Opera House, the Leaning Tower of Pisa,

Tokyo Tower, Niagara Falls and the world's tallest building: the Taipei 101 Tower in Taiwan.

In the UK, participating landmarks included Spinnaker Tower (Portsmouth), Royal Research Ship Discovery, (Dundee), St Catherine's Chapel (Abbotsbury), Town Hall (Leicester), City Hall (Cardiff), Shell Centre (London) and the Gateshead Millenium Bridge.

### Children and diabetes

In 2007 and 2008, World Diabetes Day focuses on promoting the UN Resolution and raising awareness of the impact of diabetes on the lives of children and adolescents worldwide.

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic diseases of childhood. It can affect children of any age, including pre-school children and even toddlers. Yet diabetes in children is often diagnosed late, when the child

has diabetic ketoacidosis, or can be misdiagnosed completely.

As a consequence, many children die of diabetes, particularly in low and middle-income countries. World Diabetes Day will aim to raise awareness of the rising prevalence of both type 1 and type 2 diabetes in this age-group, and emphasize the importance of early diagnosis and education to reduce complications and save lives.

### Diabetes documentary

The US TV channel Discovery Health aired *Diabetes: A Global Epidemic* a definitive look at how diabetes affects the global community on 18 November. The programme, supported by Novo Nordisk, features narration from actress Glenn Close and looks across six continents to gain greater knowledge of the condition and how it affects different communities.

The programme follows Francine Kaufman, former American Diabetes Association

president, as she journeys from the US to South Africa, India, Brazil, Australia and Finland in her quest to increase focus on the prevention, treatment and care of diabetes. Dr Kaufman discusses with physicians and thought leaders the challenges of the condition, as well as their success stories of treatment and prevention. In addition, she spends time with people with diabetes of all ages who offer a unique insight into the realities of living with the condition.

### High impact factor

The full impact of the World Diabetes Day Resolution will take many years to unfold. There are two main challenges that need to be addressed: the prevention of diabetes itself, and the prevention of complications in those affected by diabetes – now numbering almost 250 million or roughly 6% of the world's adult population. Different strategies and responses will be required. The Resolution, by calling on UN Member States to develop national policies for the prevention of diabetes, underscores the need to stem the tide of new cases to prevent the world's healthcare systems from being overwhelmed.

The development of national policies for the prevention of diabetes will create many challenges, not the least of which will be to understand better the environmental and societal factors that are driving what has been called the epidemic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Individual lifestyle choices and changes in the living environment beyond the control of the individual will need to be scientifically

evaluated. Simplistic responses ('no-one told you to over-eat and not exercise') do little to solve the problem. It will require increased public awareness of the prevention of type 2 diabetes and the responsibility that individuals and families over the lifestyle choices they make. However, strategies must be developed to address the negative changes to the living environment that are behind the pandemic. These strategies will demand whole-of-government actions, not just the actions of agencies responsible for healthcare.

The reality is that there will be no automatic increase in funds for diabetes for either prevention or treatment in the short term. The International Diabetes Federation recognizes that the diabetes world will need to be part of the solution and not simply be regarded as the problem. People with diabetes, when educated in self-care and empowered, are critical to the success of any programme. The diabetes world demonstrated how it was able to Unite for Diabetes to achieve the Resolution.

