

Editorial

The Rising Tide of Diabetes and Obesity in Pakistan: A Call to Action

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Introduction

Pakistan is included in high prevalence countries which have diabetic population, facing a major health concern.¹ This is leading to a major economic burden causing millions to suffer from it all across the country.

It is estimated by International Diabetes Federation (IDF), that Pakistan is number 7, for the highest number of diabetic population in worldwide, with around 33 million people affected.² It is also projected that this number shall rise to 62 million by year 2045, making us climb the ladder to number 5. Evidence in studies has also documented that Pakistan has 26.1% prevalence, with 30.8% in urban areas, and 19.2% in rural.³

Obesity is one of the main factor, leading to detection of diabetes, special in type 2. It is also estimated that around 50% people above 18 years are diabetic. The same is true for children and young adults, where every one in 4 are facing the challenge.⁴

The duo of diabetes and obesity plays far reaching effects, causing involvement of multiple organs. These can be divided according to type of vessels involved, microvascular or macrovascular. Financial impact is also enormous for these complications, which is difficult to meet for a third world country like Pakistan.⁵

The reasons for this are many, leaving us thinking to identify and control them. Following are few, which are of course not exhausting, but require serious action.

1. **Lifestyle:** Lack of physical activity with advent of new technologies is key factor

2. **Genetic:** Though no proper testing is available to recognize genetic pattern, but the history and findings strongly suggest genetic predisposition in large population.
3. **Access to Healthcare:** being a third world country with limited amount to spent, health remains as among poorly spent financially.
4. **Awareness:** Education about chronic disease plays an important role. Though improving with new technology use, it is still poor, due to multiple factors.

Obesity and Diabetes have a massive impact on economy of Pakistan. It is estimated that Pakistan loses 1.27 Billion dollars due to these diseases and the complications because of them⁶. It is important to take serious action, but what could they be? Let's talk about them.

1. **Awareness:** social, electronic, print media should be used. We are resource deficient country, but simple measures must be taken. In every educational awareness campaign, family and close relatives should be involved, as they are main stake holders.
2. **Access to Healthcare:** with resource deficiency, it becomes more important to utilize all available. Accountability, involvement of private sector and collaboration with both of them are of highest importance.
3. **Healthy Lifestyle:** Public awareness campaigns on diet and exercise, from children to elderly, can be accomplished by involving print and electronic media. New modalities like cartoons and movies with messages can play vital role.
4. **Early Detection:** It is estimated that a third of population is still undiagnosed. Population with strong family history, age above 40 years and waist above 90 cm in males and 80 cm in females must be checked for presence of Diabetes.



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- 5. Quality Research:** Pakistan has wealth of human resource. Proper channelization, data collection and evidence generation is not difficult. Education is required for healthcare professionals to take it to right direction.⁷

It is not possible for single person to perform this task. Government, people and private sector must work together to control diabetes and Obesity epidemic in Pakistan.⁸ Steps can be taken to improve, for which few suggestions are as under.

- A national registry for diabetes must be created, as it is in developed countries. It will help in directing resources to concerned population.⁹
- Develop an Obesity and Diabetes control program, with special emphasis on providing essential medicines like Insulin to door step. Few NGOs are providing that in country. Their experience can be shared with public sector.¹⁰
- Already available outdoor and Indoor services should be improved by evaluation and plugging gaps.¹¹
- Public awareness is of prime importance. Guidelines also keep changing. It becomes important to develop connection with patients and their families, which is possible through modern tools of Media.¹²
- As addressed before, research and data are enormous in this part of world. Current practices favour evidence, which can be channelized appropriately by training and utilization of local data.¹³

To conclude, it is imperative to take action.¹⁴ Time is running out as obesity and Diabetes are interconnected. Treating one and leaving other is not the order of day.

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