Poor diet and unhealthy lifestyles are a deadly choice, experts warn

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Qatar has overtaken the U.S in the obesity stakes and people must do more to ensure a healthy future, free of diabetes and associated illnesses, for themselves and their children.

That was the message that came from a high-level symposium organized by Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar’s (WCMC-Q) Department of Global and Public Health.

The event, which was co-sponsored by the Supreme Council of Health, was entitled Emerging Trends in Health Care and Lifestyle Diseases: A Special Focus on Qatar, and featured speakers from around the world. It was also an opportunity for the Department of Global and Public Health to launch the *Journal of Local and Global Health Perspectives*. This is an international peer-reviewed, open access journal from QScience.com. Dr. Ravinder Mamtani, WCMC-Q’s Associate Dean for Global and Public Health and Dr. Albert Lowenfels from New York Medical College are the joint editors-in-chief and the aim is to provide a global perspective on health issues and to publish research into the application of public health strategies in diverse regions and environments.

The new journal was welcomed by Dr. Faleh Mohamed Hussain Ali, Assistant Secretary General for Policy Affairs at Qatar Supreme Council of Health (SCH), who delivered the keynote remarks and welcomed the publication as a much needed and timely arrival for researchers, physicians and medical students.

“We are missing such journals and it is a welcome addition to the medical publications landscape and will also be a great contribution towards the health of our nation as a whole,” Dr. Faleh said. “This is something that shows perspective, both in local and international dimensions. Having something that looks at the scientific issues from a local and international perspective is a great benefit to us all.”

Dr. Javaid Sheikh, Dean of WCMC-Q delivered a speech on Optimizing Health Care through Education, Research and Clinical Programs, while Dr. Mamtani spoke on the topic Chronic Disease Risk Factors in Qatar: Recent Findings.

Dr. Mamtani said lifestyle diseases are of concern in Qatar as recent research shows. Obesity is an important risk factor and the number of people living in Qatar who are overweight is increasing. Obesity increases the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, hypertension and diabetes.

“Globally, 63 per cent of people die from non-communicable diseases. In these diseases the top four diseases are cardiovascular diseases, cancer, respiratory diseases and diabetes and they constitute about 80 per cent of mortalities,” Dr. Mamtani said.

Prevalence of these diseases and risk factors is also widely prevalent in Qatar. About 70 per cent of people in Qatar are overweight and 41 per cent are obese in recent data provided by the Supreme Council of Health.

“These diseases, as science has shown, kill prematurely, they compromise quality of life and we also
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“Often we think that we need to do a lot to prevent these illnesses. That is not the case. Often simply making some marginal changes will help. In the case of obesity, for example, as little as eight to 10 pounds reduction in weight will contribute to improved health. Equally important, simple self-care approaches such as a healthy diet, regular physical activity and maintaining a normal body weight are immensely helpful in reducing the incidents of diseases such as diabetes.”

That message was echoed by Dr. David Katz, the Director of Yale University’s Prevention Research Center and an internationally renowned expert on nutrition, weight management and chronic disease prevention.

Dr. Katz added that the problems Qatar faced were mirrored across the world.

He said: “Obesity threatens the U.S future as much as it threatens the future of Qatar. These problems are global. Obesity is a major problem that leads to many illnesses and diseases.”

The symposium was told that 42 per cent of Americans are expected to be obese by 2030 and one third of all American adults will face problems caused by diabetes by 2050.

Dr. Katz blamed lack of physical activity, tobacco and poor diet as the main causes of early death by illness and it is something that we can all control in our daily lives. What is needed is a return to basic lifestyle changes, he said, stressing that personal motivation remains a crucial element in changing dietary habits, raising activity levels and adopting healthier options to ward off the possibility of illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity and cancer which have the highest mortality rates across the globe.

That advice is currently being echoed by WCMC-Q’s Sahtak Awlan: Your Health First campaign, which is trying to educate people about living healthier lifestyles.

The symposium, which was co-sponsored by the Supreme Council of Health, also saw speeches from Professor Stephanie Abbuhl, a leading women’s advocacy speaker from Pennsylvania University where she is the executive director of Focus on Health and Leadership for Women. Professor Abbuhl provided a perspective on advancing women in medicine and science.

Finally, Dr. Albert Lowenfels’ talk focused on health, disease and the intestinal microbiome. In his discussion he explained about the possible relationship between the gut bacteria and chronic disease such as obesity and diabetes. Further research is currently underway regarding the possible health effects of changing the intestinal microbes.