

Editorial

SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY

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The recent World Diabetes Congress was organized by the International Diabetes Foundation (IDF) and Emirates Diabetes Society in Dubai, between 4th and 8th December, 2011. Professor Jean Claude Mbanya, IDF’s President, explained that such an important event “is taking place during a milestone year for diabetes and other Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), more broadly. The congress meets at an extremely advantageous point after the United Nations High-Level Summit on the prevention and control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). This Summit made the world take notice of diabetes and other NCDs for the first time and has already proved to be a catalyst for major change at a global level, as well as providing a framework of action for the future” (Programme Book, page 9).

The fifth edition of the IDF Diabetes Atlas was also launched at the Congress. This document includes very important facts and numbers with respect to diabetes. For instance, it reports that 366 million people from all over the world had diabetes in 2011 and that this number will increase to 552 million by 2030. Fifty percent of people affected by diabetes (i.e., 183 million) are still undiagnosed. In 2011 alone, diabetes was the main cause in 4.6

million deaths. Healthcare expenditures due to this disease account for 11% of the total healthcare expenditures worldwide, i.e. about 465 billion US dollars. All countries suffer the consequences of the diabetic epidemic but particularly those with social and economic disadvantages. Four out of five people with diabetes live in low- and middle-level income countries. Moreover, as we know very well, people affected by diabetes have an increased risk of developing serious complications, such as: cardiovascular, kidney and eye diseases, nerve damage, diabetic foot and others [1].

Since the diabetic epidemic became so wide-spread, than the focus towards its prevention was the logical next step. Although the idea of prevention was introduced during Eliot Joslin’s time, serious attention was paid only from the beginning of the nineties [2, 3]. Currently, diabetes’ prevention is considered imperative.

To be truly efficient, the preventive methods have to start with the cause and action mechanism of the disease. The etiopathology of diabetes mellitus, like other metabolic diseases, combines two groups of factors: hereditary and environmental factors. Unfortunately, hereditary factors are still difficult to change; scientific progress is made

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fast, Nobel Prizes for genetics are numerous nowadays. However, it will be long until we will be able to influence and control the genetic causes of major human diseases [4].

Therefore, the current efforts towards diabetes' prophylaxy focus on controlling the

environmental factors. These factors are numerous and, hence, the major once were reunited under a very suggestive name: the *modern negative lifestyle*. [Table 1](#) below summarizes these factors:

Table 1. Main Components of the Modern Negative Lifestyle.

• Unhealthy nutrition
• Sedentary lifestyle, lack of physical activities
• Smoking
• Pollution
• Stress
• Alcohol, and other harmful substances, in excess
• Drug abuse
• Spiritual and moral disorders

Our focus is on improving, even eradicating these factors and, implicitly, reducing the risk of diabetes [5]. However, one cannot stop from wondering: are we really doing *enough*? Are we truly aware of the grave danger that billions of people are exposed to?

Things are all but simple. Everything changes when it comes down to systematic, coherent, sustainable, and costly actions. Despite notable efforts from the US, Finland

and a few other countries, there is still a lot of work to do, especially in terms of informing public opinion and policy makers, etc, about this treacherous disease. The medical community has a sacred duty, i.e. to blow the whistle and to recommend the best course of action. However, doctors are a significant but rather small part of the global community. Without mobilizing forces at the global level, the enemy cannot be defeated.

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