

## **Management of Obesity**

Obesity is a complex, multifactorial, and largely preventable disease, affecting, along with overweight, over a third of the world's population. If secular trends continue, by 2030 an estimated 38% of the world's adult population will be overweight and another 20% will be obese. In Malaysia, according to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2019, the obesity and overweight prevalence in adults rose to 19.7 % and 30.4% respectively, indicating that half of Malaysian adults were overweight or obese as of 2019.

Obesity remains greatly underdiagnosed and undertreated, possibly due to its lack of recognition as a chronic disease. This is indeed worrying as we are now swamped by the Covid 19 pandemic wherein overweight & obesity are key risk factors for worse outcomes. Studies have shown that obesity, particularly severe obesity (BMI > 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup>), is associated with increased risk of hospitalization, critical care admission and fatalities. Chronic inflammation and oxidative stress, hypercytokinemia, immune dysregulation, endothelial dysfunction, and cardiovascular abnormalities are all possible mechanisms through which the excess in adipose tissue could lead to the acute hyperinflammatory state that characterizes severe Covid 19 infections and is responsible for its complications.

Though the science behind obesity is complex, the benefit of a 5-10% weight loss results in a significant risk reduction of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular risk factors, improvements in blood lipid profile and blood pressure. Unfortunately, the treatment of obesity is equally challenging and based on the NHMS data from 2011 to 2019, obesity and overweight continues to rise despite efforts from the Ministry of Health, public awareness programs and campaigns. Numerous barriers to medical obesity treatment exist, the topmost being obesity not being recognized as a disease, cost of treatment, social stigmatization and lack of training among health care professionals (HCPS).

This shows that obesity management requires treatment strategies that are coordinated, realistic, sustainable and impactful at every level. A 'public-private', multidisciplinary and multimodal approach seems to be the most promising strategy in delivering treatment options to a large segment of the population afflicted with the disease. As HCPS, we can't wait any longer as we owe it to our patients to treat them holistically. Perhaps it's time to 'shift the goalposts'?

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