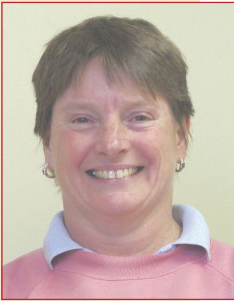


Editor's comment

Another epidemic



With the all-pervading presence of HIV and AIDS in southern Africa it is easy to forget that we have another epidemic in our midst, that of lifestyle diseases. Of these, diabetes is easily the most challenging and complex. According to the International Diabetes Federation, 177 million people were living with diabetes at the end of 2001. This figure is apparently still rising.

Type 2 diabetes accounts for between 85% and 95% of diabetes in Western countries, and probably more in the developing world. Not to neglect the importance of type 1 diabetes, it is type 2 which is using up significant health care resources. In Europe, the costs associated with type 2 diabetes account for between 3% and 6% of total health expenditure. Why the rise in type 2 diabetes? There is no simple answer to this. The ageing population certainly contributes, as does a generally sedentary lifestyle, accompanied by poor eating habits and the resultant rise in obesity. The sad thing is the type 2 diabetes is largely preventable. And, in established disease, the complications of cardiovascular, and peripheral vascular disease can also be minimised through lifestyle interventions.

General practice should be seen as the coalface of medicine, although the increasing reliance on specialists as the first line of care is eroding this important position. However, this does not in any way diminish the importance of good general practice care in mitigating the effects of diabetes, and even of preventing its occurrence altogether in many patients through timely lifestyle intervention. Only the general practitioner can form the close relationship with his or her patient which is needed for behavioural interventions to be successful.

On another subject entirely. Over the next few months there will be some changes occurring in CME. We will have a new look in the New Year and there are going to be some changes in the way in which articles are presented. Without losing the main topic each month, more information around other topics should enhance the usefulness of each edition. As a new editor I would welcome feedback from my readers. Please feel free to contact me at any time by phone or e-mail through the SAMA offices in Cape Town.

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