

Think Tank

addresses obesity epidemic

Stakeholders across the country meet in first bariatric rehabilitation think tank

As obesity statistics grow, so do the pressures on health professionals, researchers and policy makers who deal with the issue. Obesity affects one in five Canadian adults, and can lead to health issues such as joint problems, heart disease, diabetes, certain types of cancer, depression and many other conditions that are made worse by obesity. Ensuring the health system has the capacity to care for these individuals is a growing concern.

"The fact is, obesity is a chronic disease, and it's going to take wide-spread planning and co-operation to address," says Dr. Arya Sharma, Medical Director of Weight Wise. "We can't afford to lose one-fifth of the population to this disease."

Along with the Canadian Obesity Network (CON) and the University of Alberta, Capital Health has taken a lead role in improving access to obesity care by connecting with other stakeholders across the country during a recent Bariatric Rehabilitation Think Tank – the first of its kind in Canada.

Forty-three decision makers, representing rehabilitation medicine, community care, research, engineering, home living, physical education and recreation, nursing and emergency medical services, came together in May to set the stage for bariatric (obesity) care in Alberta and across the country.

Priorities identified include reviewing the way new buildings are designed, ensuring adequate resources (both human and financial) are in place for research and programs, educating health professionals and others in the community on obesity, and preliminary discussion around an obesity research institute.

The University of Alberta in Edmonton is planning to offer a new post graduate certificate specifically related to bariatrics in the area of rehabilitation medicine.

The new Edmonton Clinic will be accessible to people with severe obesity. This means building wheelchair ramps that are wide enough to accommodate a bariatric wheelchair or scooter, making wider doorways and elevators, and ensuring there are sturdy bariatric chairs, wheelchairs, beds and other specialized equipment available.

The region is also working to establish best practices protocol and a centralized inventory of equipment for staff and physicians involved in the area of bariatrics. It is also developing a comprehensive list of bariatric experts and current research across a variety of fields including rehabilitation medicine, community care and physician education.

"To solve this issue, we need to think big," says Dr. Sharma, who is also Chair of Obesity Research and Management at the University



of Alberta and Scientific Director for the Canadian Obesity Network. "We have a great opportunity here in Edmonton and I am confident that in 10 years we will be the country's leading centre for obesity research, prevention and treatment." ●



Dr. Arya Sharma

Chronic diseases managed through information technology

ALBERTA IS EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL CHRONIC DISEASE MANAGEMENT TOOLS BASED ON THE DATA IN ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS.

THE CDM registry helps physicians assist clients with chronic conditions to live healthier lives for as long as possible. "The CDM Registry ensures clinical information is shared and care providers have the most current patient information to make the most informed and safest decisions," says Marianne Stewart, Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer, Primary Care Division.

The CDM Registry currently contains information on over 12,000 diabetic patients from Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and has been deployed to 130 physicians practising in 22 clinics in four PCNs. A further 20,000 patients are being followed by the Regional Diabetes Program.

"As a family physician, the CDM registry expands my capacity to manage patients with chronic conditions," says Dr. Harvey Sternberg, Family Physician and Co-Chair Edmonton West PCN. "The registry enables the team to identify those patients who require specific services and follow-up care. Managing these patients better reduces the long-term risks and hospitalization rates associated with diabetes and other chronic conditions."

Health regions in Edmonton and Calgary have partnered with Alberta Health and Wellness and Canada Health Infoway to pilot new information tools, as part of the Alberta Infoway Chronic Disease Management initiative. The tools are being piloted at two clinics – one in each city – for the better management of patients



with diabetes and hypertension. The goal of the initiative is to provide more functionality to each of the region's CDM registries.

The initiative takes the regional registries one step further by providing web-based summary tools that help health providers proactively tackle chronic disease management. These tools provide accurate, real-time health summaries for patients, allow clinicians to monitor care against clinical standards based on best practices, and increase communication between care providers for better co-ordinated patient care.

The Alberta Infoway tools also provide indicators and alerts that allow care providers to focus attention on high-risk patients. This proactive

Karen Kastelic, RN, at the Edmonton West Primary Care Network, reviews a patient record in the Chronic Disease Management registry with Dr. Harvey Sternberg.

approach to care can decrease or prevent complications, increasing a patient's quality of life and decreasing the need for acute care services.

Plans are underway to start implementing the Alberta Infoway tools within the broader primary care community in both Edmonton and Calgary by the end of the year, and then, across the province. ●