

editorial

Diabetes mellitus is a significant public health problem in Puerto Rico. It is the third leading cause of death in the Island with an anticipated tendency to increase in forthcoming years. In 1997, type 2 diabetes mellitus was a contributing factor in the deaths of nearly 2,100 Puerto Ricans. In addition, recent data has shown that in those over 18 years, the prevalence of diabetes is almost 10%. Still, in many persons the condition remains undetected due to personal unawareness of the disease. A series of risk factors, which increase the likelihood of developing diabetes mellitus, have been identified. Among these, obesity, lack of exercise, ethnicity, and family history of the condition are the most prominent.

Diabetes is a chronic disorder often accompanied by complications that include, blindness, kidney failure, hearth attacks, strokes and significant circulatory disorders that often lead to amputations. Thus, people with type 2 diabetes have a substantially reduced life expectancy with age-specific mortality rates approximately twice the rate in non-diabetics. Concomitant disorders such as hypertension and high cholesterol levels complicate the clinical picture of diabetic patients. However, complications of diabetes may be prevented or delayed through specific actions. It has been clearly demonstrated, that optimal control of diabetes prevents the complications of the disease, reason for which the treatment and prevention must be everyone's concern.

It is clear that an aggressive public effort must be adopted at every community level in order to prevent diabetes and decrease the burden in those with the disease. Public health surveillance and educational models adapted to the Puerto Rican population, as well as specific areas of research addressed to our diabetics are critical for early identification of specific risk factors and high-risk groups. It is imperative to work on the development of strategies to reduce the economic and human cost of the disease as well as in the creation of health care policies and the establishment of mechanisms to evaluate progress in prevention and control of diabetes.

In the year 2000 the Puerto Rican Legislature approved a Law establishing a Diabetes Center for research, education and medical services to improve the quality of life of the diabetic patients. (Law 166, see Appendix, page 189). A Board of Directors was appointed and has initiated the administrative organization of this new structure. The by-laws for the Board of Directors have been approved, the implementation of other administrative guidelines are in process and the physical facility, located at the Medical Sciences Campus, is already scheduled for remodeling.

This special edition of the Puerto Rico Health Sciences Journal includes several articles with diabetes-related data in Puerto Rico as well other studies pertinent to the burden of the disease, particularly in the Americas. The issue also comprises the new definition of diabetes and its complications. It is our goal that clinicians, researchers and educators in the health-related professions can have this information available as a reference data to assist them in their research studies or projects in the multiple areas of interest of the disease and its sequelae.



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