

Letter to the Editor

Qatar National Diabetes Strategy for the growing diabetes pandemic (2016-2022) - are we there yet?

Sir,

Diabetes Mellitus (DM) is increasingly recognized as a major public health challenge with 422 million people suffering worldwide in 2014.¹ Awad et al anticipated that by 2050, that DM prevalence and incidence in Qatar will rise significantly, emphasizing the rapidly expanding need for health care resources to treat the condition and highlighting the necessity of intervention techniques for treatment and prevention that are specific for each nationality in Qatar.² In 2016, Qatar established a 5-year strategy with 6 focused pillars 'The Qatar National Diabetes Strategy' (QNDS) with the slogan "preventing diabetes together" to tackle the ever-growing diabetes prevalence.³ QNDS planned to empower four key groups: the public, patients, health care professionals and researchers. Following were the six strategic pillars of QNDS: first pillar 1a: awareness - focused on delivering clear and consistent messages to all individuals to help them make decisions about their lifestyle delivered via multimedia channels and opportunistic screening across the community. First pillar 1b: prevention-diabetes screening was planned to be incorporated opportunistically as well as within routine health checks within community for all. Second pillar: patient empowerment - focused on provision of patient self-management programs via multichannel approach to help people take charge of their own health that suits their unique lifestyle. Third pillar: care delivery - this pillar emphasized the development of clear patient pathways to provide consistent high-quality pathways for patient care achieved via hotlines, central care coordinators or mobile apps. Fourth pillar: human capability and capacity building - emphasis was on having adequate qualified workforce equipped to support the provision of upcoming all-inclusive diabetic services. Fifth pillar: information management - focused on ways to implement evidence-based information technology which facilitated communication, education, evaluation for workforce and self-management for patients. Sixth pillar: research - focused on addressing the gaps within the infrastructure for the committee of research implementation group in Qatar with funding allocation to align with international standards.

Although there were six pillars of QNDS, literature review suggests no evidence to see any improvement on first five pillars except for sixth pillar which was research. Research publications on diabetes with international collaboration highlights the process of reforming the pathway for diabetes research, which has been valuable experience

towards reforming diabetes care in Qatar.⁴ One of the key development research projects includes investments in funding the phenotyping and early detection of Qatari population with prediabetes and DM.⁴ However, the larger population of Qatar is made up of expat population which has been excluded in the research. Furthermore, 49% of research was done on etiology and only a few numbers of papers reported research on diabetes prevention (4%) and therapy development (6%), as well as detection and diagnosis (6%).⁴ The Qatar research development and innovation (QRDI 2030) initiative was unveiled in 2020 to address high incidence diseases like DM and offers guidance for research and innovation in Qatar for the next decade.⁵

Qatar still faces enormous challenges when attempting to halt or reverse the growing DM epidemic in community where obesity is the main driver of DM incidence.⁶ It has been highlighted that major reductions in DM can be gained by targeting obesity prevalence in teenagers and adults. This can lead to a reduction in 39% of new DM cases and 13% of DM-related deaths can be avoided with a 50% reduction in obesity prevalence by 2050.⁶

To conclude, following implementation of QNDS for the growing diabetic pandemic there seems to be ongoing efforts for the Qatari population, however, expats in Qatar make most of the population, so, are we there yet? DM and obesity still pose a major challenge for Qatar's total diverse population, hence, focusing on obesity, could result in marked reduction in the disease's prevalence. An ongoing robust evidence-based diabetes strategy that considers current challenges focusing on all of Qatar's population including the major expat community is vital.

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