

General practice; best placed to curb Australia's obesity epidemic

Abhijeet Ghosh

University of Wollongong and Illawarra-Shoalhaven Medicare Local, Australia

While national policies and state wide approaches to preventive health and health promotion is definitely required to address the issue of chronic disease globally; local and smaller catchment surveillance systems are the need of the hour to continuously implement focused strategies targeting these conditions at small community levels and thereby actively evaluating local health strategies so as to regularly monitor the trends of chronic disease across nations such as Australia. On these lines the Illawarra-Shoalhaven Medicare Local which is one of the 61 medicare locals formed under the Australian government National Health Reform Agreement, undertook a pilot study to assess the feasibility of implementing a sentinel site surveillance system in regional NSW to monitor chronic disease prevalence and its associated risk factors. The study was conducted in one of the major general practices in the Illawarra-Shoalhaven catchment of regional NSW and found higher than national average estimates were found for the age-adjusted prevalence of obesity/overweight (67.1 vs. 63.4%). These findings were higher than prevalence estimates of obesity identified in the regional health profile of the Illawarra-Shoalhaven region which estimated an obesity prevalence of 57.2%.

While the pilot study has demonstrated that routinely collected general practice data offers a feasible opportunity for monitoring obesity prevalence and its associated risk factors; further research is being undertaken to include larger number of sentinel sites that are generalizable to the population being served to provide an accurate and region-specific system for the purposes of planning evidence based and consumer specific interventions to control the burgeoning epidemic of obesity in regional Australia.

Biography

Abhijeet Ghosh has a Bachelor of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) from University of Delhi, India and post graduate qualifications in Medical Ultrasonography. Furthermore, he completed his Master of Science in Population Health in 2010 and has been working in the field of Public Health research and health management since 2007. He is currently the manager of Population Health and Planning at the Illawarra-Shoalhaven Medicare Local, a not-for-profit health organisation in NSW Australia. Additionally he has also been teaching Epidemiology at the University of Wollongong since 2011.

aghosh@isml.org.au