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Food deserts and swamps impacting on health: Tale of two cities

Availability of various foods is an important determinant of what people buy and eat, thus impacting on their health. This is illustrated in our studies of two cities: one large; i.e., Cleveland, Ohio, replete in “food swamps,” and one small; i.e., Madison, Wisconsin, site of many “food deserts,” food swamp which is readily-accessible convenience stores and fast food restaurants; food desert where it is difficult-to-buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Food swamps and deserts often co-exist. Availability of nutritious food is one determinant of people’s diet; others are cost, cultural, racial, ethnic, habits, and inadequate transportation in low-income areas. Fast foods in restaurants and junk foods in convenience stores, rich in carbohydrates, fats and sugar, are associated with increased risk of being overweight/obese and increased prevalence of type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and cancer. Recent WHO European Region report indicated poor diet, overweight and obesity which contribute to a large proportion of cardiovascular diseases and cancer, the two main killers in the Region. Lack of essential nutrients/minerals, lead to growth impairment, organ dysfunction, and failure in maintaining normal nitrogen balance in the body. Using housing- and food-outlet data (Cleveland) and UW APL, UWSMPH, and WI Depts. HS/U&RP data (Madison), employing GIS, food swamps in the former and food deserts in the latter have been mapped, corresponding to areas of poverty, people of color, and increased prevalence and poorly-controlled diabetes. Emphasizing complexity of poor diet choices, a refrigerated 40-foot trailer offering fresh fruits and vegetables in 8 Madison food deserts was unsustainable after 2 years because initial consumer interest declined.

Biography

Don S Schalch has completed his MD from the University of Cincinnati, OH, in 1960. He completed his Medicine Residency and Fellowship in Endocrinology and Metabolism from the University of Rochester, NY, in 1964. He was a Visiting Scientist at Erasmus University in Rotterdam and at Kantonspital in Zürich in 1972-73, and joined the University of Colorado Medical School Faculty in Denver, CO in 1974. In 1982, he became the Chief of Endocrinology at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. He has published 101 papers, has been a reviewer for 3 journals, and became an Emeritus Professor since 1999.

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