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Patients learn about the staggering rise, and the enormous financial and personal cost, of Type 2 diabetes and what they can do to avoid it

TYPE 2 DIABETES and YES, YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Dr Ben Turner, diabetes specialist and consultant physician, Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Wilson Practice Patient Participation Group (WP-PPG) committee member Vernon Burford did a double act to bring the stark reality of this 'modern day Black Death' to a packed audience at Alton Health Centre on Wednesday evening (9 November 2016).

Dr Turner opened the evening with some national statistics, showing that the incidence of Type 2 diabetes has doubled in England in the last 20 years and, with a few regional variations, that now nearly one in 10 adults suffers from the disease, this figure rising to 24% in the over 75 age group. He explained that the trend is still upward, with some 700 new cases of diabetes being diagnosed in the UK every day. Furthermore, it is estimated that more than 940,000 people are living with Type 2 diabetes but have not been diagnosed.

The cost of treating diabetes and complications arising from it in the UK is almost £10 billion a year, 10% of the NHS budget, and that's before the cost of time off sick, lost productivity in the workplace and the inevitable impact on individual lives is taken into account.

The audience heard that family history is a major predisposing factor, but obesity, a large waistline (being apple-shaped rather than pear-shaped) and inactivity present significant risks. People from south Asia and those living in a socially deprived situation are also more likely to be affected.

Dr Turner explained that whilst many understand diabetes to be a disease that affects the body's ability to process sugar effectively, unless they or a family member or friend have the disease, they are often less aware that common results of diabetes include poor circulation leading to swollen limbs, ulcers and potentially amputations, diabetic retinopathy (compromised eyesight and potential blindness), heart disease, risk of stroke increased by 60%, kidney failure, depression and dementia, as well as a reduced life expectancy (six years less if diagnosed at 50) and reduced quality of life.

These days there are at least seven different types of medication available to treat Type 2 diabetes; they work in a number of different ways to offset impaired insulin production or efficacy in sufferers, and therefore, as long as diabetes is well controlled, the adverse effects can be avoided or minimised.

After what was, in parts, quite a shocking expose of the true impact of diabetes for some people, it was welcome news to hear that Type 2 diabetes is reversible by weight loss or bariatric (gastric banding or by-pass) surgery. Dr Turner explained that the effect of surgery is instant, so it is not just the weight loss induced by the surgery that switches the diabetes off, although for most people weight loss by more conventional means is a more practical route than surgery.

Vernon Burford, a member of the WP-PPG committee then shared his personal story of weight gain following quitting smoking and how ultimately he was diagnosed as 'pre-diabetic'. His quest to lose weight had been a very usual story of losses and gains, but about a year ago he started the 5:2

(fasting) diet as advocated by TV doctor, Michael Moseley. Over the course of a year, Vernon shed more than two and a half stones (16kg) and, as importantly reversed his pre-diabetic status. He acknowledged that the regime of two days a week of a very low calorie diet would not suit everyone, but it has worked for him and he intends to follow it for the rest of his life. He has been inspired by that particular programme and in his own words he has '*chosen to live longer and feel better*' and observed that '*nothing tastes as good as feeling better feels*'. He also reminded the audience that The Wilson Practice Patient Participation Group runs a 'Men Only' weight loss group which is always happy to welcome new members or those wishing to discuss their weight management.

Dr Turner congratulated Vernon on his achievement and commitment to a healthier lifestyle. He recommended to the audience an excellent and highly readable publication from the charity Diabetes UK called 'Enjoy Food' and explained that low calorie, low carbohydrate and Mediterranean diets have all been shown to be effective in helping those with and at risk of Type 2 diabetes to reverse the trend. This was an uplifting end to what had been a very interesting, but at times rather salutary, presentation about a modern epidemic.

ENDS

Information for editors

- For more information please contact Rosie Lewis, The Wilson Practice : rosie.lewis@nhs.net or on 01420 81989
- A summary sheet from the presentation is attached
- The WP-PPG Men's Weight Loss group is open to all local men. For more information: Ken Jones on 01420 542784
- More information on diabetes and living with either Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes: from www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes