

Experts gather and pledge to fight obesity

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On Anti-Obesity Day celebrated on 26 Nov, IIM Ahmedabad's Healthcare Club Panacea organized a unique one- of- its-kind Anti-Obesity and Fitness Conclave for #IndiaFightsObesity movement.

The event was motivated by PM Modi's #FitIndiaMovement where the best of minds gathered to deliberate on how society needs to stop stigmatizing Obesity and treating it as a behavioral abnormality. The problem of weighing more than one should has many factors, including certain genes where the implications are not just biological but also physiological, environmental, societal and cultural. The fight against obesity needs gutsy will as it is not just about how many people are overweight or obese. The gathering pledged for a fitter India movement and wage a war against Obesity.

India is a big country, and it is getting larger. As the 3rd most obese nation with more than 13.5 cr people suffering from Obesity, surpassed only by China and the US, the country needs to be cognizant on how it spends its scarce resources. 73% of urban Indians are overweight, that is 3 out of 4 people and a recent Lancet report quotes that 34% of India's population is insufficiently active. What is even more alarming is that millions of youngsters and millennials are battling medical conditions and complications that arise from obesity - such as hypertension, sleep apnea, diabetes (India has 80 million diabetics), joint problems, heart disease, respiratory issues and certain cancers. Not to forget, the implications of the incalculable emotional cost attached to it. For decades, obesity epidemic has been treated as fad diet. The conclave aimed to bring about a paradigm shift in how obesity has been perceived and treated, as well challenge the established notions.

Mandira Bedi – anchor turned fitness enthusiast led the discussion to raise awareness on causes and preventive tips for obesity and related complications. Leading experts from the field of obesity and wellness were present and the keynote speaker was none other than the Dr. Dinesh Barot - State Programme Officer - Health & Wellness Cell, Commissionerate of

Health, Gandhinagar. He highlighted how obesity has led to an immense increase in the mortality rates across the nation – nearly reducing life expectancy by 9 years in women and 12 years in men. He congratulated regulators especially the insurance regulatory body (IRDAI) which recently included bariatric or weight-loss surgery under insurance and called it a “revolutionary step for a fitter India”. Supporting the cause were leading obesity specialist Dr. Mohit Bhandari, famous Indian body builder Sonali Swami, IIM (A) Professor Rajesh Chandwani, leading diabetes surgeon Dr Shashank Shah and CEO NoObesity Dr Manish Khaitan.

Mandira Bedi tested fitness quotient of the audience by challenging them to stand on one leg with their eyes closed, interestingly most of those present were not able to stand for more than a minute. While many saw the shared a laugh, it also made them question their fitness and look for better health guidance. Ms. Bedi strongly impressed upon the attending audience, the importance of looking for right treatments at the right time.

Most of the people not only blame themselves for Obesity, but also battle societal stigma. It is high time that one understands Obesity is a disease which needs treatment by a specialist. Even the government has taken a serious note of this epidemic and has ensured strong measures. The National Multisectoral Action Plan for prevention and control of common non-communicable diseases (NCDs), National Monitoring Framework (NMF), Ayushman Bharat and FitIndiaMoment are some of the key initiatives of the government to support this cause.

A massive and revolutionary step this year has been the inclusion of insurance cover for those who want to opt for obesity treatment. Although misinformation about obesity treatment is still very rampant, surgical intervention is an option for people with 40+ BMI and 35+ BMI along with comorbidities. Insurance will cover medically advised treatment as per new IRDAI regulation.

Dr Mohit Bhandari: “Most patients who come to us have tried so many failed diets. Metabolic surgery provides a second chance to those patients trying to make long-term changes and make them lose 50-60% of their excess weight. At one point in time people thought that obesity was a disease of the rich, but that is not true anymore. Now with insurance cover, it will be of a great help to people who need this life-saving treatment.”

Dr Manish Khaitan: “Any disease is detrimental to a patient’s quality of life. NCDs (non-communicable diseases) even more so. Obesity is as chronic a disease as diabetes and needs treatment for life. It hampers mental and physical quality of life. Our focus should be on long term cure and prevention.”

Dr. Shashank Shah: “Obesity is a complex disease depending on multiple factors like metabolism and total energy expenditure. However, individuals and society wrongly blame lack of willpower, when it is actually because of hormonal action which interferes with metabolism and gives rise to obesity. Like any other disease, a person suffering from Obesity should seek expert opinion for individually designed solution.”

The Anti-Obesity conclave was also attended by patients suffering from morbid obesity, who shared their personal journey.