

Diabetes could cripple health budgets, says expert

More than 53 million Europeans, or 8.4 percent of the adult population, suffer from diabetes. New figures from the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) predict the numbers could reach 9.8 percent of adults by 2025.

"The projections are that unless this epidemic is turned around, it has the capacity to cripple all healthcare budgets," said Professor Martin Silink, president-elect of the IDF.

Most developed countries spend around 10 percent of their healthcare budgets on diabetes now. But the illness, which is often linked with obesity, is increasing at the rate of about 7 million new cases a year worldwide.

"Healthcare budgets will just not be able to cope," Silink told Reuters.

The IDF, which presented its findings at the European diabetes meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, believes Eastern European nations have a higher risk of seeing their economies disrupted by the diabetes epidemic.

RISE IN YOUNGER PATIENTS

Although the prevalence rates in Eastern Europe are similar to those in Western Europe, which range from 2 percent in Iceland to 11.8 percent in Germany, their healthcare infrastructure is at risk because of lower economic development and younger patients.

"What has been seen all around the world is that in developing economies the greatest increase in diabetes is in the productive years of 40-65, whereas in the more mature economies the rate of increase is in older people," Silink said.

So employers, health insurance companies and governments could face rocketing prices for treating people and to cover disability costs and social and medical services.

Diabetes is a chronic illness that occurs when the body does not produce enough, or effectively use, insulin. The illness also increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney damage and nerve disorders that can lead to foot ulceration and amputations.

Most of the new cases will be Type 2 diabetes, which could be prevented by lifestyle changes such as increased exercise and a healthy diet, according to the IDF.

Silink said the international community needs to take the diabetes epidemic more seriously otherwise it will jeopardize the health and lives of millions.

"It is a global issue. What we are proposing is that there be a recognition by the world community of this epidemic and we have launched a campaign to try and get a United Nations resolution on diabetes," he added.

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