



Thomas C. Meyer, MD

## Editorial

# Combatting obesity: What's working, what's not

Thomas C. Meyer, MD, Medical Editor, Wisconsin Medical Journal

Obesity surely is and will continue to be one of the major medical scourges of this century. Equally surely, it is a malady that health professionals cannot deal with on our own. We need all the help we can get from many sources—from the community, through business and maybe even government—if significant inroads are to be made in managing such a widespread epidemic. Perhaps one of our major roles is to keep the issue in the foreground by whatever means we can devise.

The *Journal* is fortunate that authors have responded to our request for papers for this issue and we thank each of them for their work.

What has evolved without any active planning is that we have several distinct groups of papers—the current status of obesity and some of the sequelae, reports of what has been tried and seems to be working, and reports of what has been tried and doesn't seem to be working.

Schumann and Remington provide a digest of the current "best guess" of the prevalence of obesity by county (p 20). The validity of self-reported data is always suspect—especially about items like weight, but at least the method for each county is consistent throughout so one can assume the results are reasonably comparable. The same applies to the

report on the comparison of overweight adolescents by states in the country (p 26) by McCauley and her colleagues. Dr Fox and her colleagues review the evidence on junk foods in schools—including the 31 pounds of sugar provided annually to each student via the soda machines(!)—and some school programs in Wisconsin and the rest of the country that are trying to alter the situation. Dr McCarty and her colleagues report their findings related to food available in the workplaces of businesses in the Marshfield area. This is a first step in a program plan to promote healthier lifestyles in that city (p 66).

Finally, Dr Her and Mr Mundt report their alarming findings related to Type 2 diabetes in Hmong immigrants (p 70). Their paper gave rise to Dr Dan McCarty's thoughtful guest editorial (p 13).

But perhaps the most exciting report in this issue is that of Drs Helwig, Schultz and Quadracci (p 15) who outline the comprehensive and incentive-laden approach used by Quad/Graphics to induce their employees and their families to exercise and eat sensibly. The account of that business's commitment to the program is indeed inspiring. We are saluting in their direction.

The "what seems to be working" group of papers is led off

by Carrel and Allen who provide us with a thoughtful review of the problem, appropriate medical evaluation, common sequelae, and a multidisciplinary approach to the management of childhood obesity (p 32). Carrel's second paper is a study of the effectiveness of nutrition education and exercise on a small group of obese Ho-Chunk children and teenagers in relation to Type 2 diabetes (p 44). Burhop and his colleagues report their impressive results in laparoscopic bariatric surgery for morbid obesity in patients aged between 18 and 71 years (p 48).

The "we tried it and it doesn't seem to be working" paper is that of Dr Rooney and her colleagues (p 54) who had the intrepidly simple idea of assessing whether pedometers given to families, with or without education, would help in controlling the weights and activity of overweight families. While the subjects expressed enthusiasm for the program, objective measurements produced disheartening results.

It leaves one wondering what we're to do. Perhaps we should sally forth with baseball bats at the ready into the community, businesses and industry and "persuade" them that they have to get into the act of combatting obesity if the scourge is to be managed!

# Wisconsin Medical Journal

The mission of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* is to provide a vehicle for professional communication and continuing education of Wisconsin physicians.

The *Wisconsin Medical Journal* (ISSN 1098-1861) is the official publication of the Wisconsin Medical Society and is devoted to the interests of the medical profession and health care in Wisconsin. The managing editor is responsible for overseeing the production, business operation and contents of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal*. The editorial board, chaired by the medical editor, solicits and peer reviews all scientific articles; it does not screen public health, socioeconomic or organizational articles. Although letters to the editor are reviewed by the medical editor, all signed expressions of opinion belong to the author(s) for which neither the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* nor the Society take responsibility. The *Wisconsin Medical Journal* is indexed in Index Medicus, Hospital Literature Index and Cambridge Scientific Abstracts.

For reprints of this article, contact the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* at 866.442.3800 or e-mail [wmj@wismed.org](mailto:wmj@wismed.org).

© 2005 Wisconsin Medical Society