

PRESS RELEASE

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GPs call for better training to fight Italy's obesity epidemic

Many say they lack the confidence to offer the best support to patients

May 17, 2018: General Practitioners (GPs) in Italy are calling for more and better training on obesity in order to improve treatment and care for patients.

A survey of more than 100 GPs in Italy has shown that 28% of them are not confident enough about the complexities of obesity to offer the best support to patients, and only half think that GPs generally provide effective advice on losing weight and overcoming obesity.

According to the survey, conducted across seven European countries for the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO), 83% of GPs in Italy feel they should have more training on its causes, consequences and treatment. One third of them (33%) reported having received less than four hours of such tuition during their entire medical training, which typically takes around 10 years.

This is despite the fact that 95% of the Italian GPs view obesity to be a serious danger to health in their country and 43% recognise it to be very serious.

The figures support the view of the World Health Organization that obesity is one of the greatest public health challenges of the 21st century as its prevalence has tripled in many countries in Europe since the 1980s¹.

A serious danger to health

Overall, GPs rank obesity fifth in a list of serious dangers to health. However, three of the top four – cancer, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes – commonly result from obesity.

The GPs agree that more effective treatment of obesity would significantly reduce the burden on the healthcare systems from the many other diseases and conditions on which it impacts.

Furthermore, there is wide agreement among GPs (92% of those interviewed in Italy) that obesity is a disease and should be more widely recognised and treated as

¹ <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/obesity>

such. More than three quarters of them (79%) agreed that it would result in better patient care.

Only three countries in Europe (the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain) currently recognise obesity a disease.

Among other key findings are:

- Nearly six out of ten of the GPs' patients in Italy are overweight or have obesity (59% in total: 37% overweight and 22% with obesity). The highest reported number of patients with obesity was in Germany (29%). The lowest in the Netherlands (15%). The European average is 35% overweight and 23% with obesity.
- 20% of GPs in Italy rarely or only occasionally initiate discussions on weight with their patients with obesity. Across Europe the figure is 28%.
- Lack of exercise is seen by GPs as the most common cause of obesity (72%)
- Bariatric surgery is an effective treatment in helping patients with obesity to lose weight (according to 86% of GPs in Italy) and is considered a positive way of treating other diseases and conditions caused by obesity.

European Obesity Day

The survey was published today to coincide with a [European Policy Conference on Obesity](#) being organised in Brussels in the run up to [European Obesity Day](#) on Saturday (May 19).

“Despite the growing epidemic and the burden it places on healthcare systems, it is clear that GP’s are given very little training on obesity,” says EASO President, Professor Hermann Toplak.

“This is a major barrier to obesity treatment. More effort needs to be made to improve healthcare professionals’ understanding of obesity and comprehensive treatment approaches that can be delivered as part of patient care,” he said.

Further details about the survey are available on the European Obesity Day website: <https://www.europeanobesityday.eu/gpsurvey/>

About EASO

EASO is Europe's leading organisation responsible for research into obesity and is the voice of the European obesity community, representing scientists, health care practitioners, physicians, public health experts and patients.

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For further information:

The Survey of 700 European GPs: <https://www.europeanobesityday.eu/gpsurvey/>

European Obesity Day: www.europeanobesityday.eu.

The European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO) www.easo.org;

Statistics from the World Health Organisation www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/obesity.

Activities around European Obesity Day can be followed on Twitter (@EOD2018 and #EOD2018) and on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/EObesityD/> .

Media contact:

Mr Tim Edgar: tim.edgar@easo.org – Tel: +32 475 37 66 93