

# Malta: an obesogenic island in the Mediterranean

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**It would be archeologically correct to state that Malta's history denotes goddesses of fertility with body mass indices that prove obesity was most likely present in the earliest civilizations of early human settlement on these islands.**

Vassallo's paper on the pathogenesis of obesity might give some explanation as to why the problem of obesity exists with us till this very date and to such an extent that Malta is amongst the top of the league table both at the European as well as at the global level. This issue of the MCPP journal has ventured into one of the global public health epidemics of this millennium. Obesity reduces the quality of the lives it afflicts and presents a socioeconomic burden for governments.

Currently Malta can be described as having an obesogenic environment that is one which favours the propagation of obesity due to the accent of the food supply and the limited infrastructure for active living. By addressing the key determinants of obesity, the problem will be attacked from its core roots and thereby provide long term favourable results in health outcomes and the corresponding socioeconomic indicators.

The World Health Organization has just convened a major European ministerial conference in Istanbul and the resulting *European Charter on Counteracting Obesity* was signed by the member states. The Charter outlines the action needed to counteract obesity underscoring the urgent need for intersectoral action to reverse the current trend in obesity. The charter provides guidance for future policy through a series of action points.

The European Commission has also taken an active role in the arena of food, nutrition and physical activity through the establishment of a European Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health and the subsequent release of a Green paper "Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases." Both tools have served well in launching a broad consultation

amongst interested parties as well as in developing a comprehensive European nutrition and physical activity strategy.

Through the adoption and implementation of tools provided by WHO and the European Commission, Malta should be able to gradually reverse the trend of obesity both in children and in adults. This will entail the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity as well as the clinical management of the obese. Not doing so would result in a drain of public finances as argued in the paper submitted by Grech. The treatment of obesity and overweight in primary and secondary care needs to be cost effective and models of good practice employed.

We augur that this issue is of interest to all practitioners in public health and also at the individual level it would enhance advocacy for healthy living.