Food security top issue for Diabetes in Indigenous Peoples Stream

Malcolm King

The Diabetes in Indigenous Peoples Stream for the International Diabetes Federation World Diabetes Congress 2015 in Vancouver is proud to present a programme where we will explore how the high prevalence of diabetes in indigenous populations is fueled by underlying social, economic and historic factors, including extreme poverty, barriers to education and health care, and the degradation of fragile ecosystems. We will discuss what progress we are making worldwide to cap this tragic epidemic of so many indigenous peoples and how some of these communities are successfully preventing diabetes and related complications leading to disability and early death. Our Stream participants include a broad range of expert stakeholders including global indigenous representatives, international health experts, and renowned researchers.

Food and nutrition insecurity and the burden of high incidence of non-communicable diseases, especially type 2 diabetes, can be found in every corner of the globe, driven by urbanization and the resulting sedentary lifestyles with changing dietary patterns. This situation is especially critical for indigenous peoples, who experience the most severe financial poverty and health disparities in both developing and developed countries, particularly where they depend on ecosystems under stress to support their needs for food and well-being.

Malcolm King, Scientific Director of the CIHR Institute of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health will chair the IDF Award Lecture entitled “Food and nutrition security in indigenous populations,” given by Harriet V. Kuhnlein, Professor Emerita of Human Nutrition, and Founding Director of the Centre for Indigenous Peoples’ Nutrition and Environment (CINE) at McGill University. In the lecture, the awardee will discuss the challenges faced by indigenous peoples in protecting their traditional knowledge and use of their local foods for physical, social and environmental health and learn what initiatives are improving indigenous peoples’ food systems and health nutrition.

In IDF’s Teaching Lecture series, Alex Brown, an indigenous doctor who has been working in Aboriginal Health in Australia will address the dynamic concept of “cultural safety” in indigenous peoples’ diabetes care along with Leslie Varley, Director of Aboriginal Health Services in British Columbia. Historical trauma in indigenous communities combines with poverty and ongoing discrimination to produce profound feelings of sadness, anxiety, depression, anger and estrangement. Jeffrey Henderson, a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe and president and CEO of Black Hills Center for Native American Health will chair an open Forum on the “Historical and current trauma
as a determinant of diabetes in Indigenous people.”

The Diabetes in Indigenous Peoples Stream will cover those communities in crisis at the far corners of the globe. Ann Ragnhild-Broderstad, Academic Director of the Centre for Sami Health Research at the Artic University of Norway will present data on risk factors for diabetes among the Sami peoples of Norway. Elaine Rush, Professor of Nutrition at the Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand will present on prevention of diabetes among Maori peoples. These two experts will certainly provide great insight into the current challenges for these communities today.

Many symposia will be presented on integrated chronic disease strategies for indigenous peoples such as a discussion on a community driven quality improvement initiative as well as a lecture on primary and secondary diabetes prevention. An international panel of speakers will address the critical subject of diabetes associated micro- and macrovascular diseases. Early-life environments and diabetes in pregnancy will be discussed as well as an in-depth look at how to reduce the risk of diabetes for future generations.

We look forward to welcoming your interest and lively discussions on the effect of health disparity and diabetes in indigenous peoples. Our panel of experts will certainly help us understand and explore the rich and diverse cultural knowledge of these communities and how they hold a positive influence on the economic, social and political dynamics of many regions.

About the Author
Malcolm King is Scientific Director of the CIHR Institute of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health and Stream Lead for Diabetes in Indigenous Peoples at WDC15.