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MPs Address Alarming Levels of Obesity in the UK
Launch of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Obesity

A new cross-party group of MPs and peers will be launching later today to promote greater awareness of the problem of obesity, its prevention and effective management. Co-chaired by Dr Howard Stoate MP and by Vernon Coaker MP, the initiative has been set up in response to recent Government reports highlighting obesity as one of the most important public health problems in developed countries, because of its links with serious killer diseases such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease^{1,2}.

Commenting on the launch of the new group, Dr Howard Stoate MP, Labour MP for Dartford said, 'The creation of the group is a significant step forward in addressing the shocking impact of obesity on the nation's health and we are delighted that there has already been so much interest and support in it. There is a need for greater leadership by politicians in recognising the immensity of the problem before us, encouraging greater co-operation between all interested parties: government agencies, public bodies and private sector industries. The group will help to focus political and wider public attention on the issues and take an active role in helping to ensure that national strategies and policies for tackling obesity are translated into direct action on the ground.'

The epidemic of obesity is growing at an alarming rate - in the UK it has trebled since 1980² - and last year's report by the National Audit Office concluded that in 1998 an estimated 30,000 people in England alone had died prematurely as a direct consequence of their weight.

The All Party Parliamentary Group is supported by the National Obesity Forum, chaired by Nottingham GP Dr Ian Campbell, who comments 'We are delighted that obesity now has its own Parliamentary forum to drive home how serious obesity is and how it can be tackled. We look forward to working with the group in the coming months and years to drive forward the changes in attitude, approach and best practice weight management that are so desperately needed if we are to tackle the growing epidemic of obesity in this country - the consequences of not responding to and managing this serious medical disease are too great to ignore''.

At the inaugural meeting, members of the new group will be offered health checks including Body Mass Index (BMI, a measure of appropriate weight to height), and waist circumference measurements – both important indicators of obesity and health risks. Dieticians will also advise members on how to achieve a healthy lifestyle, including reducing the amount of fat in their diet.

Notes to the editor:

- In the UK, 1 in 2 adults are sufficiently overweight for it to potentially harm their health. 1 in 5 are obese¹.
- Obesity is a chronic, relapsing and potentially life-threatening medical condition and a recognised contributor to a wide range of other serious health problems and killer diseases. For example, compared to people of a healthy weight:
- Obese people are twice as likely to die from heart disease⁴
- Obese men are at least 7 times⁵, and women at least 27 times⁶ more likely to have type 2 diabetes
- Obese men are 33% more likely to die from cancer⁷, obese women have a 55% greater chance of dying from cancer⁷
- The UK is in the midst of an epidemic of overweight and obesity. If current trends continue, more than a quarter of all UK adults will be obese by 2010^{1,2}.
- Not only will rising levels of obesity create huge levels of physical suffering and disability, but it will also impose a significant financial burden on the NHS and the economy as a whole
- The National Audit Office report, published in February 2001 concluded that in 1998 alone, obesity resulted in 18 million days of sickness absence, 30,000 premature deaths and a total cost of £2.5 billion to the NHS and the economy as a whole¹.
- This report was followed nearly a year later by the Public Accounts Committee report, which also concluded that obesity is a major public health concern, with serious implications in terms of human and social costs. Local NHS strategies should be put in place around the country to ensure that adequate management and treatment regimes are available, whilst at the same time preventing people from becoming overweight and obese in the first place².
- Weight loss of only 5-10% can lead to significant improvements in health for obese people³

References

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