Diabetes – The Greatest Epidemic in Human History? Implications for Asia

The “Diabesity” epidemic (obesity and type 2 diabetes) is likely to be the biggest epidemic in human history. Diabetes has been seriously underrated as a global public health issue, and the world, especially Asia, can no longer ignore the inexorable rise of type 2 diabetes.

Currently, most of the diabetes estimates come from the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) and the World Health Organization (WHO). However, these estimates have significant limitations from a public health perspective. More reliable estimates of the future burden of diabetes and a better understanding of the drivers of the epidemic, particularly in countries like Malaysia, are urgently needed to prevent type 2 diabetes.

There has been comprehensive attention to “traditional” risk factors for type 2 diabetes, but the spotlight is turning to the impact of the intrauterine environment and epigenetics on future risk in adult life. It highlights the urgency for discovering novel approaches to prevention, focusing on maternal and child health. Diabetes is the greatest epidemic in human history as it has affected the greatest numbers and at a great cost, and the worst is yet to come.

For more than 30 years, Professor Paul Zimmet AO has been one of the world’s most influential diabetes experts, in both clinical and research areas. He is former Director, and now Professorial Fellow, at the Baker IDI Heart & Diabetes Institute, Professor of Diabetes at Monash University, Australia, Senior Principal Research Fellow at South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute, and Honorary President at the International Diabetes Federation (IDF).