

Tackling overweight & obesity: the difference 5-10 can make

Summary of a roundtable hosted by Mr. Cristian Buşoi MEP in the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 19 May 2010

1. INTRODUCTION

To mark the first [European Obesity Day](#) (EOD) on 22 May 2010 and high-profile activities taking place in a high number of EU Member States, EOD supporter Mr. Cristian Buşoi MEP hosted a roundtable discussion with EOD MEP supporters and supporting organisations in the Parliament on 19 May. Panellists included:

- Mr. John Dalli, European Commission, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Affairs
- Mr. Jean-Paul Allonsius, President, Belgian Association of Obese Patients (BOLD), EOD founder
- Prof. David Haslam, Chair and Clinical Director, National Obesity Forum, EOD founder
- Prof. Gema Frühbeck, President Elect, European Association for the Study of Obesity
- Mr. John Chave, Secretary General, Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union

2. SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS

a) Mr. John Dalli

The EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Affairs outlined the European Commission's view.

- Tackling overweight and obesity is of paramount importance from a public health perspective.
- The EOD initiative and the efforts by EOD supporters across Europe are to be welcomed.
- However, prevention is likely to remain the focus of the European Commission.

b) Mr. Cristian Buşoi MEP

Briefly introduced the current political debate on overweight and obesity at EU level.

- Obesity is a pan European problem that needs to be discussed and debated at European level.
- The focus of the current 2007 European Commission strategy is on prevention.
- European Parliament Resolutions of 2007 and 2008 call for more action including complementary measures such as having obesity recognised as a chronic disease, reinforcing the role of health professionals and ensuring that sufferers are not discriminated against.
- [Written declaration 0034/2010](#) is an important step and I urge my colleagues to sign it.
- We need to revisit the issue of obesity and overweight with patients and health professionals.
- EOD is an opportunity to reflect on priorities and check where we are in the fight against obesity.

c) Mr. Jean-Paul Allonsius

Gave a patient perspective based on his personal experience.

- Why treat obesity? To avoid epidemics of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and premature death.
- What is obesity? It's a disease. This must be recognised and appropriate solutions put in place.
- Unfortunately many sufferers do not have the right answers. They may be drawn to products and services - false medications - that have no health benefit or may even cause them harm.
- We need to guide them to the right answers: a multi-disciplinary approach involving health professionals who can help patients change behaviours and make long-term sustainable changes.
- EOD would like treatment of overweight and obesity to be prioritised alongside prevention.
- Please help us by signing the online EOD [European Citizens' Initiative](#) calling for action.

d) Prof. David Haslam

Introduced the medical perspective as both a General Practitioner and an obesity specialist.

- EOD supports a prevention focus BUT nobody can 'prevent' overweight and obesity in the approximately 40% of EU citizens who already suffer from the disease.

- Treatment must be prioritised alongside prevention to avoid epidemics and premature deaths.
- When a citizen has the courage to ask a health professional for support, we must help. Obesity is an under-diagnosed and under-treated condition BUT there are solutions.
- Our EOD '5-10 for a healthier Europe' campaign this year focuses on educating the public on what is healthy weight loss and why you need to lose weight.
- In parallel, we are raising the issues at European level to generate support for these solutions.

e) Prof. Gema Frühbeck

Explained the physiological benefits of healthy weight loss.

- EASO supports this year's EOD campaign. Experts recommend 5-10% weight loss as the primary treatment strategy for obesity and those who suffer from related co-morbidities.
- While rapid and uncontrolled weight loss can be dangerous, a gradual and sustainable weight loss supervised by a General Practitioner can bring many health benefits.
- Numerous health benefits can be derived even from a moderate weight loss, particularly when it is intentional and sustained over the long term.
- A healthy lifestyle, especially focusing on a balanced diet and exercise, are strongly advised.

f) Mr. John Chave

Outlined the role of pharmacists in the fight against obesity, giving examples of best practice.

- Health professionals need to develop their role in relation to the treatment of obesity.
- Community pharmacists come into regular contact with overweight and obese citizens and can be part of the solution in collaboration with other healthcare professionals.
- There are many examples of pharmacy-centred weight management programs and nutrition initiatives that have brought huge benefits.
- Pharmacies across Europe have this year been able to help to promote EOD and raise awareness of the need for individuals to take action and if necessary seek further medical support.
- Primary care centred approaches to obesity need to be further developed and improved.

3. ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

After the interventions and discussion among panellists, the Chair opened the floor for comments.

- **Oana Elena Antonescu MEP** highlighted the growing problem of childhood obesity and the responsibility of the food industry. In addition to educational measures and clear food information to consumers, she advocated the introduction of a special tax on 'junk food'.
- **Prof. Frühbeck** and **Mr. Allonsius** regretted the lack of evidence-based weight loss drugs, and the fact that certain products have been recently withdrawn from the market. This has meant that health professionals had lost an important tool for the treatment of obese patients, while patients still accessed the drug via internet without the involvement of health care professionals.
- **Sophie Crousse, GlaxoSmithKline**, reiterated that GSK was a proud sponsor of EOD. She asked whether MEP Buşoi was concerned about the availability of ineffective weight loss products and if the Parliament could encourage the European Food Safety Authority to look into the issue and prioritise evaluation of relevant products under the EU health claims regulation. He agreed, indicating that there were formal and informal channels to achieve this.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- The need to prioritise treatment of overweight/obesity alongside prevention was emphasised.
- The importance of ensuring citizens have access to effective and safe solutions was highlighted.
- It was generally agreed that there is much more to be done and that EOD has a role to play in combating overweight and obesity, supporting patients and calling for action by Europe's leaders.