Recommendations Regarding Childhood Obesity

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SOC-S101: Medicine in America
Obesity presents itself as affecting populations worldwide but is especially noticeable in children and adolescents. Various factors exacerbate this obesity epidemic. Because many children experience more time with screens, more of their waking hours are sedentary; in fact, citing a study published in the International Journal of Obesity, Ebbeling et al. (2002) obesity risk “increased by 12% for each hour per day of television viewing.” Although not reflective of obesity’s relation with media consumption, Figure 1 from “Preventing Childhood Obesity: A School Healthy Policy Guide” (Pekruhn 2009) pictorializes the upward trend of obesity, specifically as afflicting children aged 6 through 19, in the United States. In truth, a sedentary lifestyle is far from the only blame; poor diet, certain genetic characteristics, and low socio-economic status all contribute to higher risk for obesity. Because obesity denigrates humans’ self-esteem and capacity to perform even non-exertive tasks, it should be remedied early on. The question, then, is how to diminish or even stop the incidence of childhood obesity.

Here I suggest a solution: that regional ordinances mandate lengths of moderate-to-intense physical activity for the persons aged 6-17. Akin to other highly localized laws, I propose that local governments investigate the prevalence of childhood obesity in their districts and, if they find that the rate of obesity in humans aged 6-17 is above a certain percentage, a decree shall be made to combat the problem. I am not in favor of punitive measures for those who do not abide by this code specifically. I feel that because of excessive number of cases, the burden of combat should be shifted in part to the leaders of a town afflicted by obesity. This approach draws from the “Healthy Communities” section of “Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance” (Koplan et al. 2005) wherein the alleviation of obesity is driven by communities that afford safe ways to engage youths in physical activity. My interpretation reaches beyond communal support by requesting official decree in favor of mandated exercise.
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Another solution could be based in the home. As mentioned, sedentary lifestyles, which consequently increase risk for obesity, are promoted by hours of watching television, but hopefully with the laws regarding exercise in place, children will have less time for television and videogames in general. Therefore, my second suggestion address the foods in a home. As obesity is also caused by poor diet (Ebbeling et al. 2002), it stands to reason that by removing foods low in nutritional value from a youth’s diet, youth will have a lower risk of obesity. Due to many children’s inability to discern nutritional value at a young age, it should be up to the parents to seek out information on healthful diets and to incorporate them into the household.

These solutions are feasible, but there are limitations to their efficacy. The notion of enacting law to dictate that which a free citizen consumes would be hotly contested by humans in favor of minimal governmental intervention. As I said, there would also be no punitive measures for non-abiding persons, which effectively removes the incentive against breaking the law. The proposition that parents simply feed their kids more vegetables and fewer cakes also has fair logistical drawbacks. For instance, do parents not already bear the responsibility of providing healthful dining options? They always have, yet Figure 1 (Pekruhn 2009) shows an unequivocally upward trend in obesity prevalence among youths.

Clearly childhood obesity increasingly afflicts the nation and much of the world. While there are certain issues with the proposed solutions, it is important to combat this epidemic by targeting youth lifestyles: altering priorities by shifting exercise nearer the top of the list and television and gaming down the list. In addition, the mealtime plates should have more vegetables and lean meats, with fewer sugary options. By following these directives, a decline in obesity should follow.
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References

