

GENETICS, DIET, INACTIVITY TO BLAME

# Diabetes soars in SA Indians

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**L**IFESTYLE illnesses like diabetes often exist in the shadows of better-known conditions like HIV and Aids.

This was why it was important to use a vehicle such as World Health Day – being observed today – to bring these conditions back into the spotlight, say activists.

Lauren Gillis, founder of Relate Bracelets – a non-profit organisation that raises funds for more than 80 causes, including health-related issues, through the sale of hand-made bracelets – said there were “huge gaps” in fund-raising and representation when it came to lifestyle conditions.

“Even global funding for HIV has decreased. This gives you a sense of the impact on things like diabetes.”

She said raising funds for health-care awareness and non-profits was a “fiercely active arena”.

“There are numerous, equally deserving causes all vying for the attention of the public, be it for diabetes, breast cancer or HIV/Aids.”

Durban, with its high population of Indians, is particularly affected by the lifestyle

disease. Research has shown that members of the Indian diaspora all over the world are genetically predisposed to diabetes.

These were the findings of a 2005 research paper published in the British Journal of Diabetes & Vascular Disease and conducted by Yackoob Kassim Seedat at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

“There (has been) a dramatic increase in the prevalence of type 2 diabetes in South African Indians and this is observed in many parts of the Indian diaspora, which includes the UK, Mauritius and Fiji. Recent data have shown the prevalence of diabetes.”

He said dietary factors and physical inactivity could contribute to diabetes mellitus.

“In a community study to determine the prevalence and known risk factors ... of 778 subjects, aged 15 to 69 years, in the metropolitan area of Durban, diabetes mellitus was present in 15.8%”.

Today Minister of Health Aaron Motsoaledi together with KwaZulu-Natal MEC for

Health, Sibongiseni Dhlomo, will commemorate the day in Chatsworth, where they will focus on the prevention and management of diabetes.

“The International Diabetes Federation estimates the prevalence of diabetes in ages 20 to 79 years in South Africa to be approximately 7%, with a total of over 2.2 million people living with the disease. The proportions of people with diabetes have

been growing steadily over the years,” said the department.

It said this growing prevalence of diabetes (and other non-communicable diseases) was closely linked to rapid cultural and social changes, ageing populations, increasing urbanisation, unhealthy eating and reduced physical activity.

The event – comprising community walks and home visits – was held in partnership with the World Health Organisation, the South African NCD Alliance, Diabetes South Africa, the Independent Pharmaceutical Association and Bongi Ngema Zuma’s Diabetes Foundation.



GILLIS