

The battle against diabetes

By Drs. Timothy Lyons and Kenneth Copeland, and Gary E. Raskob, Ph.D.

Oklahoma faces a looming public health and health care crisis that demands action on several fronts.

The state has seen a major increase in diabetes during the past decade. Diabetes diagnoses have doubled, with Type 2 diabetes fueling the increase. Overweight and obesity are the drivers for increased Type 2 diabetes among Oklahomans. Unhealthy eating behaviors and lack of physical activity are two key factors that cause people to be overweight or obese.

It is a national problem, but one of particular concern in Oklahoma because of a large at-risk population. Diabetes kills about 3,000 Oklahomans each year. In financial terms, the disease costs our state \$1.5 billion a year.

At the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, we know tackling diabetes requires a two-pronged strategy. The first is to provide excellent treatment for those diagnosed with diabetes and to provide clinical preventive therapy for those at risk for developing diabetes. The second strategy involves creating in schools and workplaces broad-based, community-centered, primary prevention programs that are effective in preventing overweight and obesity.

Improving treatment through research is a priority of the new Oklahoma Diabetes Center, an OU program. In addition, the OU College of Medicine has committed tremendous resources to bringing talented physicians and scientists to Oklahoma to further these efforts through basic research and clinical trials to find cures and new and better treatments.

The OU Department of Pediatrics has advanced a strong effort to reverse an alarming trend — the growing number of children, especially teens, diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. Strides are now being made right here in Oklahoma to better diagnose and treat these young



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people.

Equally important is the prevention of diabetes, which is the focus of efforts at the OU College of Public Health. The college is working to help Oklahomans change behavior and lifestyle choices, to make healthier food choices and to increase their physical activity in an effort to prevent diabetes.

We know prevention begins early. We must begin to evaluate school breakfast and lunch programs to ensure our children are getting off to a healthy start. Our schools should also be given the resources necessary to provide physical fitness programs every day for all youth.

Our state is fortunate to now have in place a great program that strives to bring better health to all Oklahomans. Oklahoma's Turning Point unites a number of local, county and state agencies with colleges and universities, private corporations and others to help encourage healthier lifestyles.

At the OU Health Sciences Center, we are building a strong public health-medicine partnership. We believe it will take the efforts of our best public health and medical experts to reduce the growing threat diabetes poses to the health and well being of our state. Together, we believe we can decrease the rates of obesity and diabetes in our state, thereby improving the health of Oklahomans, reducing healthcare costs and boosting our state's economic competitiveness.

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