Obesity:

The voice and opinions on obesity

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 When it comes to obesity, the topic is not news to the CNMI. In a recent survey conducted by the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation and the Non-communicable Disease Bureau in 2016, about 64% of the total population in the CNMI is either overweight or obese (Durand, M., Bourne, J., Tuohey-Mote, D., Khorram, D., & Abraham, I, 2016). Some of the major causes of this uprising epidemic are, of course, taste, the consumer's environment, and the and the convenience of low-priced food that are unhealthy in the CNMI. Having the opinion of local residents in the community helps determine if obesity is a major problem, what they think causes it, and how we can resolve it together.

I conducted a survey in which 43 anonymous people responded. The survey asked them if obesity is a big problem in our economy and why. 40 out of 43 people said yes because they can see that the general population is overweight/obese. One of the questions in the survey asked if they think that the CNMI is handling this problem efficiently. Half of the respondents said no, mainly because they still see a lot of people who are associated with this problem. This shows that obesity is a problem that most of the community knows, but still have. In the survey, I asked them “what mainly causes you to eat junk food?” 30 people said taste, and 19 people said convenience/price.

Eating habits are not only affected by taste , it is also affected by the aroma, look, texture, and smell. When the body is in the presence of savory junk food/sweets the body reacts to it as a stimuli. Therefore, the mouth begins to salivate, crave, and when the consumer takes that bite, the brain creates little dopamine rewards. Dopamine is a biochemical compound that is released to give people that ‘satisfaction’ or ‘feel good’ feeling ( Wilcox, 2009). Majority of the food items that trigger this feeling is usually from expensive well-prepared food, or cheap processed food.

There is no doubt that the cost of food is one of the primary factors of our food choices. People with a lower-income rate “...‘have a greater tendency to consume unbalanced diets and in particular, have low intakes of fruit and vegetables’” (Bellisle, 2006). However, access to more money does not automatically mean a better quality diet.

With these two reasons in mind, another question in the survey asked, “What are some ways you think the CNMI should tackle this [obesity]”? There was a lot of great suggestions and creative ideas that ranged from having healthier food more accessible for those who can’t afford it, to lessen the amount of junk/processed food items in the market, and from reaching out to the school systems and make exercising and awareness fun again.

Having the opinion and different perspectives of people about obesity in the CNMI can really help determine the problem of why, and how, they see the solution of it. Obesity is a problem that should not be taken care of by the government alone, but by the people themselves.

References

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