

Global Health Newsletter

March 2023

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Americas

Diet Pills and Surgery Approved for Obese Children

Childhood obesity is defined as having a BMI >95th percentile for age and sex and it is estimated that over 14.4 million children and adolescence are considered obese with a prevalence of almost 20%. Risk of obesity is multifactorial and occurs as a combination of genes, socioeconomic group, parental education level, race and ethnicity, gut microbiome, food insecurity, and access to healthy affordable foods. Often unhealthy food and beverage marketing is targeted at children.



The American Academy of Pediatrics have updated the guidelines for evaluating and treating childhood obesity which now include medications and surgery. The new comprehensive obesity treatment now consists of physical activity treatment, behavioral therapy, nutrition support, pharmacotherapy and bariatric surgery. These guidelines also recommend physicians begin obesity evaluations for children starting at the age of 2, instead of 6. Four medications are approved for long-term use in children 12 years and older: Orlistat, Wegovy, Saxenda and Qsymia. Phentermine is approved for short term use in those 16 and older. Setmelanotide has been approved for those older than 6 with a genetic predisposition to obesity. Weight loss surgery is now approved for those 13 years and older.

Further Reading

<https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/151/2/e2022060640/190443/Clinical-Practice-Guideline-for-the-Evaluation-and>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9740713/>

Middle East/Northern Africa

Thalassemia Clinical Trials in Abu Dhabi - Onyinye Egbunike MS3

Thalassemia is a group of autosomal recessive inherited blood disorders where people produce defective hemoglobin, which gets destroyed by the spleen and results in anemia. The disorder is more commonly found in people of Middle Eastern, African, Mediterranean and South-East or East Asian descent, affecting an estimated 5-30 percent of people in these ethnic groups. There is no current cure but treatment options such as blood transfusions, folic acid, stem cell or bone marrow transplants are available to patients.

Given that thalassemia is one of the most common genetic disorders in the United Arab Emirates, its capital city, Abu Dhabi, is set to begin clinical trials to develop a new thalassemia treatment. These Phase 3 ENERGIZE and ENERGIZE-T trials will test the efficacy and safety of a new drug, Mitapivat, a novel pyruvate kinase activator 3. Given its mechanism of increasing ATP production and decreasing levels of 2,3-diphosphoglycerate, it has demonstrated potential in being a leading drug in management of a range of hereditary hemolytic anemias such as sickle cell disease and pyruvate kinase deficiency. Previous research has shown that this drug significantly increases hemoglobin levels, decreases hemolysis, and improves overall outcomes in



patients with pyruvate kinase deficiency 8 . With this evidence, the trial aims to assess the drug’s ability to decrease transfusion requirements in transfusion-dependent and non-transfusion-dependent thalassemia patients.

The ENERGIZE trial, is recruiting adult patients with non-transfusion- dependent alpha-or beta-thalassemia (defined as ≤ 5 transfusions about every 6 months), will begin with a typical screening period and run for 24 weeks. The ENERGIZE-T trial, is recruiting adult patients with transfusion-dependent alpha- or beta-thalassemia (defined as ≥ 6 transfusions about every 6 months) will run for 48 weeks. The researchers are hopeful that Mitapivat will be a gamechanger to how thalassemia is being treated today, describing the drug as “a disease-modifying therapy that can address persisting unmet needs of patients in the UAE and around the world”.

Further reading

<https://gulfbusiness.com/abu-dhabi-to-begin-clinical-trials-to-develop-new-thalassemia-treatment/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8721383/>

<https://www.io.nihr.ac.uk/techbriefings/mitapivat-for-treating-pyruvate-kinase-deficiency/>

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/2023/02/13/abu-dhabi-to-start-clinical-trials-to-develop-game-changing-new-thalassaemia-treatment/>

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa2116634>

<https://www.energizeclinicaltrials.com/hcp>

Asia/Pacific

Fire in Cox’s Bazar

On March 5th a large fire swept through part of the Cox’s Bazar impacting 12,000 Rohingya refugees and caused damage to the world’s largest refugee camp. It is estimated that 2,000 shelters along with mosques, schools and health centers were destroyed. Fortunately fatalities have not been reported. The cause of this fire is unknown. Fires are common in the camps where people live in cramped conditions in flimsy bamboo and tarpaulin shelters. The refugees are also confined to the camps via barbed wire fencing which hinders their abilities to flee the fires. Between January 2021 and December 2022 there were 222 fire incidents reported.



<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/fire-breaks-out-coxs-bazar-refugee-camp-bangladesh-2023-03-05/>

The refugee camp was informally formed in 1991 when thousands of Rohingyas fled Burmese military’s Operation Pyi Thaya. In July 2017, there were estimated 34,000 refugees. However, beginning in July 2017 extensive attacks began by the military and citizens of Myanmar against the Muslim minority Rohingya population. The Rohingyas have been attacked due to their religion. They are Muslim and Myanmar is a predominantly Buddhist country. Currently, there are approximately one million Rohingya Muslim refugees the 34 refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar Bangladesh making it the largest refugee camp in the world.

Further reading

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/06/rohingya-refugee-camp-fire-bangladesh-coxs-bazar>

<https://www.iom.int/news/thousands-rohingya-impacted-recent-camp-fire-iom-responds>

Sub-Saharan Africa

Cyclone Freddy

Cyclone Freddy has broken meteorological records and is now considered the longest cyclone lasting 36 days and all-time highest accumulated cyclone energy ever recorded. The trajectory was also unusual as it traveled almost 5,000 miles and decreased and increased strength during this travel. Cyclone Freddy formed off the coast of Australia in early February, crossed the Southern Indian Ocean and made landfall on the Island of Madagascar (February 21) and traveled west to Mozambique where it has hit twice, the second time March 11 and then to Malawi. Hundreds are missing, it has killed over 500 people, injured over 1,000, displaced more than 500,000 and affected greater than 1.7 million people, as of March 21 with these numbers estimated to rise.



This cyclone has caused immense destruction with heavy rains, strong winds which has led to flooding, mudslides and increase in infectious diseases. Some areas received 8 to 26 inches of rain in only two days. It has caused the destruction of crops, homes and public infrastructure including schools, hospitals, electricity, water pipelines. In Malawi the power grid was crippled and the hydroelectric dam is currently inoperable. Mozambique and Malawi are among the poorest 8% of countries in the world according to the United Nations with over half of the population living below the poverty line. These two countries were also facing a cholera outbreak when the cyclone hit causing concern for the situation to worsen due to floods. So far the cholera cases have quadrupled since February with over 10,700 current cases. In Mozambique this week over 2,300 cases have been recorded. This is the beginning of the disaster and the effects will change and be felt for months and possibly years to come.

Further reading

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2023/03/17/1164256900/cyclone-freddy-shattered-records-people-lost-everything-how-does-the-healing-beg>

<https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/2530184/cyclone-freddy-death-toll-in-malawi-hits-326>

Europe

Increase in UK Foreign aid Spending in Country

UK's foreign aid budget is capped at 0.5% of the national income which is approximately 11 billion pounds. Of that, 4 billion pounds is estimated to stay within country to support asylum seekers and refugees currently located within the country. In 2021, the Government spent about 10 percent of the total official development assistant budget inside the UK which is larger than any other sector. In 2019 the UK spent 6,700 pounds per refugee which increased to almost 22,000 pounds in 2021. The Commons Homes Affairs Committee was told that the government is spending 5.6 million pounds a day on hotels for those who have submitted a claim for refugee/asylum status, with an additional 1.2 million pounds for Afghan refugees who fled during the Taliban takeover. This focus on in country costs results in a decrease in funding foreign humanitarian programs in conflict areas. There is further criticism as there is a large backlog in processing cases for refugee and asylum seekers requiring longer term housing accommodations paid by the government, further increasing costs. Under international rules, countries are allowed to spend foreign aid on domestic costs of asylum seekers and refugees for only the first year after their arrival. Due to an increase in international conflicts there has been a massive increase in those arriving to the UK, driving up costs. This year the Home Office estimated 140,300 people arrived from Ukraine and the number is expected to rise further.



Further reading

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/02/overseas-aid-budget-uk-select-committee-report-housing-refugees>

<https://www.devex.com/news/uk-government-to-push-ahead-with-home-office-aid-budget-raid-104884>

What's New at Northwell's Center for Global Health?

Daniel Leon MBA PMP

Surgery Sets Sights on Guyana

The Northwell Health Global Surgery team met with Guyanese Healthcare officials in February, to discuss the future of surgical innovation in Georgetown. The Northwell Surgical team plans on visiting Guyana in June to address a backlog of almost 100 hernia patients. Along with addressing the needs of patients in Guyana, Northwell plans on using the opportunity to further train its partners on laparoscopic hernia surgery best practices.



"We are looking for opportunities where our doctors can upgrade their skills to be able to see how things might be done in a more developed country, and at the same time offer to Northwell and to its residents a chance to learn [from us]" says Guyanese Minister of Health, Dr. Frank Anthony of the country's partnership with Northwell.

The Northwell surgery team is planning to visit Guyana at the end of March to attend a Hernia conference and present case studies. They will also be discussing logistics surrounding the hernia initiative.

Guyana Empowers Medical Students in Climate Research

The Center for Global Health recently held a meeting with the Ministry of Health in Guyana to explore ways to optimize the involvement of medical students in data collection efforts, particularly surrounding climate change in the country. The meeting aimed to identify areas where data could be collected to support the application for grant funding for sustainable practices that would mitigate the impact of climate change on the health of Guyanese citizens.



Deputy Director of The Center for Global Health, Shari Jardine, stated, "Climate change is a global challenge that requires local solutions. By partnering with students on data collection, we can leverage our collective expertise and resources to inspire change that benefits both the health of Guyanese citizens and the environment."

Representatives from the Ministry of Health highlighted the importance building sustainable practices in Guyana and creating a better future for all. The Center for Global Health and the Ministry of Health plan to continue working on identifying opportunities for data collection to support climate change efforts in the country.

Northwell lends a helping hand in Turkey and Syria

The Center for Global Health, led by director, Dr. Eric Cioe Pena was at Northwell's Bethpage Distribution Center, in early March, attending a press conference for the gathering of 22 pallets of medical supplies, earmarked for Turkey and Syria. The pallets which included items such as dialysis kits and trauma supplies, were prepared to support Earthquake relief efforts and remedy a shortage caused by the ongoing war in Ukraine. In fact, the announcement from Northwell CEO, Michael Dowling, that the system would be organizing relief efforts, came just a day shy of the one-year anniversary of Northwell sending Humanitarian aid to Ukraine.



“We’re all part of one global family,” said, Mr. Dowling of the event. “And when there’s one part of the family in severe distress, we as a health care organization have to be concerned about people in other parts of the world.”

Also at the conference were Consul General of the Republic of Turkey, Reyhan Ozgur and VP of Public Health Advocacy at Northwell, Dr. Sandra Lindsay. To view video of the event, hosted by Sandra Lindsay, click [HERE](#).