

# **PREVENTION OF DISABILITY and PREMATURE DEATH**

**An address at the  
Sri Selva Vinayakar Temple  
South Maclean**

**Brian Senewiratne**

**BA (Cantab), MA(Cantab). MBBChir (Cantab)  
MBBS Hons (Lond) D(Obst)RCOG (Lond),  
MD (Lond). FRCP (Lond). FRACP**

**Consultant Physician  
Clinical Professor of Medicine**

- **On 16 July 2016, Dr Brian Senewiratne was asked to address the devotees in the Sri Selva Vinayakar Temple in South Maclean on a Medical subject which he thought would be of importance to the public.**
- **He spoke on:**
- ***“The prevention of disability and premature death”.***
- **Here is what he said:**

- In the past, say at the time I started Medicine (1954), there were several diseases that could be cured by a pill eg typhoid, Tb, infections after child-birth etc. The situation is very different today. Most of the diseases we see today cannot be cured by medication or surgery. All that can be done is *prevention* of the disorder. They are caused by life-style problems that cannot be cured by a pill.

**Prevention is the answer**

**THERE IS NO OTHER WAY  
IT IS AS SIMPLE AS THAT**

# Leading causes of death

- Heart disease
- Cancers
- Chronic lung disease
- Cerebro-vascular disease (strokes)
- Accidents (MVA, home, violence)
- Alzheimer's dementia
- Diabetes
- Influenza and pneumonia
- Kidney disease
- Depression leading to suicide

- **There is clearly no time for me to deal with all of these in one session but they are very important and I will have to do so on another occasion.**
- **Let me deal with some of them even briefly.**

# Heart disease

- In most cases, this is coronary artery disease. There could be disease of the heart valves or the heart muscle, but by far the most important is obstruction of the coronary arteries (which I have just dealt with).
- The main cause(s) of coronary disease is cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes, an elevated cholesterol in the blood, obesity and a positive family history of heart disease.
- I will deal with all of these later.

# Cancers

- The main cancers are cancer of the **lungs** (90% caused by smoking), of the **breasts** (which can easily be detected by doing a mammogram and ultrasound of the breast, of the **stomach** (a sudden loss of appetite or weight loss), of the **large bowel** (which can be detected by a simple test for blood in the faeces), **cervix** (readily detected by a 'Pap smear'), **prostate** (difficulty in passing urine and a blood test), **kidney** (pain in the loin or passing blood in the urine), **pancreas** (unfortunately one of the most difficult cancers to detect - being jaundiced (yellow) is one, pain across the belly going through to the back is another), of the **brain** (also difficult in some people but there are usually neurological symptoms such as a weakness of the limb(s), speech disturbance etc.

# Chronic lung disease.

- **(COPD** –Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) – almost always caused by smoking. There are other causes but these are rare. In people who have never smoked, COPD is rare or very rare.
- So the answer to this debilitating disease for which there is no cure, is not to smoke.

# Cerebrovascular disease (CVD)

- same as coronary artery disease (smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol etc).
- **CVD** might not be completely preventable but its incidence certainly can be reduced.
- It is a dreadful problem because, as I have said, once the main artery in the neck enters the skull, it is beyond reach – nothing can be done by way of cure.

# Accidents ( motor vehicle (MVA), at home, violence)

- **MVA** – extensively dealt with by the police and others. (speeding, drink driving etc). I do not need to go into this.
- **At home** – accidents at home especially of the elderly (falls) are very important and will be dealt with later. Many are preventable
- **Violence** – domestic violence and violence outside, are important – the incidence is rising. Many are preventable.

# Alzheimer's dementia

- This is a difficult and not well understood problem which I will deal with later. It is usually in the elderly but 'pre-senile dementia' is well recognised and the incidence is rising.
- Loss of memory is an important feature. That said, you simply cannot diagnose Alzheimer's in everyone who has an impairment of memory. You need much more than this.

# Diabetes – Type 1 and Type 2

- Type 1 is a disease usually of children and is usually a genetic problem. It can occur in later life especially in neglected Type 2.
- Type 2 is very much more common and the vast majority are obese or overweight. Weight reduction is crucial in this dangerous disorder. I will deal with this later.

# Influenza and pneumonia

- Which in the elderly and young can be disastrous, if not fatal
- There are effective vaccines available for the prevention in both children and adults. Though they may not always prevent the disorder, they are well worth taking.

# Kidney disease

- Usually from one of 3 causes – diabetes, high blood pressure and diseases of the kidney itself (nephritis).
- The first two can certainly be prevented in the vast majority of people

# Depression and anxiety

- One of the most common disorders that can cause enormous disability and death (suicide).
- These are so important that I will spend an entire session on these disorders that are greatly misdiagnosed and mistreated.
- I have recorded a piece on this. You google my name and put Affective Disorders (Affective = Mood), you will find it. If you want the dvd I have recorded, contact me – [bsenewiratne@gmail.com](mailto:bsenewiratne@gmail.com) and I will post it to you. There is no cost involved

# **Preventable causes of disability and death**

- **Smoking**
- **High Blood pressure**
- **Obesity**
- **Physical inactivity**
- **High blood sugar**
- **High Cholesterol (LDL)**
- **High dietary salt**
- **High dietary fat**
- **Alcohol**
- **Low intake of fruit and vegetables**

# Smoking

- It is the most preventable cause of disability and death.
- Of \$36 billion we spent on Health in Australia, some \$18 billion was on treating diseases caused by smoking.
- It is a huge waste of life and money

# High blood pressure

- Many of the complications do not need to occur. Get your GP to check your BP and if it is greater than 150/90, get him to check it on another day. If it is still elevated, you need treatment.
- Get a “Heartsure Blood pressure machine” (about \$60) and check it yourself. You must be shown how to use this properly.
- If it is up, then the answer is to get off all salt and salty food, get your weight down if overweight, go for a walk (60 min/4 km) and if it is still up, then drug therapy.

# Obesity

- This is becoming one of the most serious and escalating problems in Australia, even in children. It is a major cause of Type 2 diabetes, can adversely affect weight-bearing joints eg the hips and knees, and do much more harm.
- The weight in kg divided by the *square* of the height in meters gives the BMI (body mass Index). If the BMI is greater than 25 you are overweight. If over 27 you are obese, and over 40, it is 'morbid obesity – a life-threatening problem.

- **Physical inactivity** – this is a common and serious problem because it can lead to several other problems.
- **High blood sugar** – in other words, diabetes out of control.
- **High Cholesterol**
- There are two types of cholesterol –
- LD cholesterol (the ‘bad’ cholesterol) the normal is be less than 2.3mM – probably 2.0 mM/l and HD cholesterol (the ‘good’ cholesterol) the normal is greater than 1.1mM/l. The total cholesterol has no meaning. You must know the LD and the HD

- **High dietary salt** – in some people a potent cause of an elevated blood pressure (BP). If the BP is elevated, step 1 is to avoid salt and salty foods.
- **High dietary fat** – especially animal fat. Vegetable oil is fine with the single exception of coconut oil – the only vegetable oil known to damage arteries.

- **Alcohol** - If taken in excess (and in a few people lacking in a particular enzyme, not in excess) can damage the liver, heart and brain. That said, it is not half as dangerous as cigarettes.
- **Low dietary intake of fruits and vegetables** - Recently shown to have a damaging effect on health especially BP and coronary disease.

# **What is the problem?**

## **Patients – the public**

- **Not knowing what causes disability & death**
- **Wanting a pill to cure the problem. No such pill exists.**
- **Refusing to change one's lifestyle**  
**(stopping smoking, dealing with obesity, lack of exercise)**
- **Refusing to take essential medications**  
**(less than 50% follow the instructions given)**
- **Refusing to be monitored (failed follow-up)**
- **Refusing to see the light of day (serious obesity in a patient with arthritis of the hip, knees or small joints of the spine)**

# **Doctors**

- **Failure to see what will cause disability/death**
- **Failure to talk to the patient (5 min in/out consultation)**
- **Failure to establish rapport. You cannot do so in 5 minutes**
- **Missing obesity**
- **Missing Anxiety and Depression**
- **Refusing to touch the patient**
- **Doing all sorts of tests without thinking.**
- **Asking whether he/she is taking the medication? You cannot assume this.**
- **Making the most amount of money in the least possible time. Unfortunately this is the 'norm' today**

## **What do you do?**

- Ask him what his diagnosis is and whether it explains all your problems**
- Ask what the pills he has given will do**
- Tell him what your concerns are**  
**(my father died of bowel cancer at 50. Did you realise that? Have you checked that?)**
- If nothing is happening – change your doctor before it is too late.**

## **Sir William Osler**

To be noted even more so today, than when he said this many years ago

- **The practice of medicine is an art, not a trade;**
- **a calling, not a business;**
- **a calling in which your heart will be exercised equally with your head.**

# The future of Medicine

- *“We have to ask ourselves whether medicine is to remain a humanitarian and respected profession or*
- *a new but depersonalized science in the service of prolonging life rather than diminishing human suffering”*

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (Swiss-American psychiatrist)

- **Tragically it is fast becoming a business -**
- **with disastrous consequences.**
  - **No one speaks to patients anymore.**
- **The consultation has become a fast in-and-out of the consulting room. That is bad Medicine.**
- **There is no need to put up with it because the price will be paid by you.**

# Doctor's Forum

A new “**Doctor's Forum/Seminar**” has been started by those involved with the Selva vinayakar Temple in South Maclean.

- It will be either on a Saturday or Sunday from 10am to 12 noon. The details will be on their website, or from Muttiah Surendra whose commendable initiative this was.
- I suggest that you attend these. The details will be on their website.
- There was a lot more that I had intended to cover but was unable to because of a late start with people arriving nearer 11 am.
- So I will have to leave it for another day.