



Australasian Society of Clinical and Experimental and Toxicologists

**MEDIA ALERT**

**FREE PUBLIC MEETING**

## **OBESITY – ARE DRUGS THE ANSWER?**

Professor Ian Caterson Director of the Institute of obesity Nutrition and Exercise (IONE), Professor Ric Day Director of Clinical Pharmacology and Toxicology, St Vincent's Hospital Sydney, Professor Margaret Morris Professor of Pharmacology, University of New South Wales, and Professor Joseph Proietto Professor of Medicine, University of Melbourne will tackle the issue of using drugs to treat obesity.

**Where: Sydney Convention Centre, Darling Harbour**

**When: 1.00pm – 2.30pm Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2009**

### **Background:**

We may all know that obesity is a global epidemic but according to recent Australian research it continues to rise significantly each year. Obesity is considered a high-risk factor in five of the eight National Health Priority Areas<sup>1</sup> and drugs, both prescription and over the counter, play a role in its treatment. Being overweight or obese increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, colorectal cancer, and osteoarthritis, with detrimental impacts on quality of life.

Concern regarding impact of obesity is reflected in the increased NHMRC funding to support research from nearly \$2.5 million in 2000 to nearly \$23 million in 2008.

All of the speakers are actively involved in research in this area and will present their latest findings and give the audience the opportunity to discuss and ask questions.

This public meeting, preceding the 2009 ASCEPT Annual Scientific Meeting, aims to attract those with an interest in these areas as well as the general public. People who would like to attend should RSVP to [ascept@meetingsfirst.com.au](mailto:ascept@meetingsfirst.com.au)

Also, please diarise 29 November – 2 December for the ASCEPT 2009 Annual Science Meeting, themed "The Rights of Medicines", with sub-themes of "The Right Drug, The Right Patient, The Right Dose and the Right Result". The diversity and quality of speakers will provide excellent opportunities for 'cutting edge' news on pharmacology and toxicology. To RSVP or for more information please email Fran Hagon at [fhagon@ascept.org](mailto:fhagon@ascept.org).

### **Media Notes:**

1. The speakers' biographies are attached and they will be available for interview before or after the meeting.
2. Media are requested to promote the meeting to their readership/viewers in the week leading up to the meeting
3. Media are invited to attend the meeting.

<sup>1</sup> These national health priority areas are: type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, colorectal cancer, and osteoarthritis.

For further information or to arrange an interview contact Fran Hagon on 0405 066 022 or [fhagon@ascept.org](mailto:fhagon@ascept.org)

## **Attachment: speakers' biographies**

### **Professor Richard Day**



Ric has national reputation as a leader in pharmacology and toxicology and is Professor of Clinical Pharmacology at UNSW and St Vincent's Hospital Sydney where he also has a clinical practice.

He has a particular interest in promoting the quality of use of medicines in the community and has developed a number of innovative approaches to teaching therapeutics to undergraduate medical students and extends his teaching activities to hospital doctors and general practitioners at St Vincent's Clinical School.

### **Professor Ian Caterson**



Ian is Professor of Human Nutrition in the Human Nutrition Unit and the Institute of obesity Nutrition and Exercise (IONE) at the University of Sydney and he led Sydney's bid to host the 2006 International Congress on Obesity.

Professor Caterson has presented on obesity issues at national and international conferences and he is also the director of the NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity. His work with public health research groups looks at the growing and serious problem of overweight and obesity, with particular emphasis on children and

young people.

### **Professor Margaret Morris**



Margaret is Professor of Pharmacology at the University of New South Wales. Her research interests include central control of appetite and brain changes in obesity and childhood obesity. She is a leading authority in this area and regularly presents at national and international conferences. Her other research focuses on stress, seizures and blood pressure control.

### **Professor Joseph Proietto**



Joe is Professor of Medicine, Austin Health at the University of Melbourne. He is a scientist and clinician investigating the genetic and biochemical causes of obesity and type 2 diabetes. He established one of the first obesity clinics in a Victorian public hospital at the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

He established the Weight Control Clinic at Austin Health, is a past president of the Australasian Society for the Study of Obesity, has been on the Council of the Australian Diabetes Society and has served on the Board of Diabetes Australia. Professor Proietto has published over 100 articles, book chapters and books on obesity and diabetes. He is an editor and reviewer of a number of international scientific journals.

# **OBESITY – ARE DRUGS THE ANSWER?**

## **Fact Sheet**

### **The size of the problem**

- Overweight and obesity are so common now in Australian adults, that they may be considered the norm. Obesity is placing an enormous burden on our health resources, and having disastrous effects on quality of life for many Australians<sup>2</sup>
- Overweight and obesity pose a major risk to long-term health by increasing the risk of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. It has been estimated that obesity and its associated illnesses cost Australian society and governments a total of \$21 billion in 2005. (ABS)
- In 2004-05, more than half (53%) of all adults, or 7.4 million people aged 18 years and over were either overweight or obese, an increase from 44% (5.4 million adults) in 1995, after adjusting for age differences. (ABS)
- There is concern that the rate of obesity will continue to rise- we need to monitor to find out if this is so, and to see if our population education and interventions are working.

### **Why is it on the rise?**

- Obesity is caused by an energy imbalance where energy intake exceeds energy expended over time.
- Obesity is related to both genetic makeup, and our environment. Our current lifestyle (relative affluence, ready availability of palatable, energy dense food and less opportunity to be active at work and home) tends to drive weight increase.

### **How can we better manage obesity?**

- While weight loss programs are effective at controlling disease, they require commitment, follow-up and weight maintenance programs.
  - More work needs to be done on targeted obesity prevention programs.
  - The benefit of an anti-obesity drug is primarily related to its ability to assist in weight loss
  - Anti-obesity drugs are effective in increasing the proportion of people achieving modest weight loss for up to two years, but they have to be combined with dietary changes, and may have side effects. Another place where drugs may be useful is helping people maintain weight loss.
  - Drugs which are currently prescribed for obesity treatment work by suppressing appetite or reducing fat absorption.
  - There is a major research push to develop better drugs to treat obesity, for instance drugs that target the brain pathways involved in appetite control.
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