

Launch of the South-Asia Obesity Forum – The Need and Scope

The South Asia Obesity Forum, a unique consortium of experts from 7 different South Asian countries, is bound together under the official tagline 'United Against Obesity.' This distinct approach, involving countries like Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal, Bangladesh, and India, sets the forum apart. The forum's vision is to address the obesity pandemic's challenges and mitigate its impact in the region through obesity education, research, and advocacy. Registered in Kathmandu, the forum, at its launch during the Annual Congress of the Sri Lanka College of Endocrinologists – SLENDO 2024, has already made significant strides, including the first edition of its official journal – The Asian Journal of Obesity, 3 ongoing publications, and a region-specific SOF declaration.

The nidus for the need of such obesity forums in the South Asian region is the global complexity of obesity as a medical condition and even more so in the South Asian context. Obesity is not just a matter of excess weight; it is a multifaceted disease with genetic, environmental, and behavioral determinants. As medical professionals, the outlook has to change from reducing weight to managing obesity as a disease. This management requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond simple diet and exercise recommendations. The treating physician needs to understand the underlying causes of obesity, such as hormonal imbalances, genetic predispositions, and psychological factors, to provide effective and personalized care to their patients.

Obesity forums like SOF play a crucial role in bridging the knowledge gap by offering specialized training and resources to healthcare professionals. Through the organization of conferences, workshops, and training programs, this forum will keep physicians updated on the latest research and best practices in obesity management. It will also facilitate networking and collaboration among healthcare providers, fostering a multidisciplinary approach to obesity treatment that involves dietitians, psychologists, and other specialists. Moreover, SOF would help draft region-specific clinical practice guidelines that can provide patient-specific advice to patients. This is especially relevant to the South Asian region as the obesity phenotype is different in this population, with a much higher proportion of body fat at a lower body mass index, a condition often referred to as the thin fat phenotype.

In addition to education and training, SOF will also play a crucial role in advocacy and policy development. By raising awareness about the impact of obesity on public health and advocating for policies that promote healthy lifestyles, SOF will help create an enabling environment for obesity prevention and treatment. This may involve collaborating with government agencies, healthcare institutions, and community organizations to implement initiatives such as obesity screening programs, nutrition education campaigns, and infrastructure improvements that support physical activity.

Furthermore, obesity forums like SOF can also serve as a catalyst for research and innovation in the field of obesity medicine across the South Asian borders. With this in mind as a first step the society has adopted the Asian Journal of Obesity as the official journal of SOF. Moreover, by funding research projects, supporting clinical trials, and fostering collaboration with academic institutions, these societies can drive advancements in obesity treatment and care. This can lead to developing new therapies, interventions, and technologies that improve outcomes for patients with obesity and related conditions.

The need for obesity forums for physicians in the South-Asian region is clear and pressing. As the region grapples with a rising tide of obesity and its associated health risks, there is an urgent need for specialized support systems that can empower healthcare professionals to address this challenge effectively. By providing education, training, advocacy, and research support, SOF can play a vital role in shaping the future of obesity medicine in South Asia and improving the health and well-being of millions of people affected by this disease.

