

ELECTIVE (SSC5b) REPORT (1200 words)

A report that addresses the above four objectives should be written below. Your Elective supervisor will assess this.

1. Compare the prevalence of diabetes in Tower Hamlets / East London compared to the rest of London / UK.

There is an estimated 3.7 million people diagnosed with diabetes in the UK, of which 90% of that figure is type 2 diabetes 1. Furthermore, it is estimated that 1 million are currently living with type 2 diabetes in England without a diagnosis of it. Type 2 diabetes is mainly diagnosed in those aged over 40 years, with 1 in 10 people estimated to have type 2 diabetes in England between the ages of 45-54 years 2. The prevalence of type 2 diabetes in Tower Hamlets is high and is estimated to increase significantly over the next few years. The average proportion of people (aged 17+) affected by diabetes in Tower Hamlets rests at 6.8%, which is higher than the average in London being 6.5% 3. On a positive note, Tower Hamlets is not within the top ten boroughs with the highest rates of diabetes, however, it still remains a major public health concern as rates of diabetes is expected to rise 3.

2. How is diabetes being tackled in Tower Hamlets / East London compared to the rest of the UK?

A significant number of type 2 diabetes cases could be prevented through behavioural changes. Countries including Finland, USA, Japan, China and India have demonstrated this through randomised controlled trials which show between 30-60% reductions in the incidence of type 2 diabetes over three years in high risk adults through lifestyle change programme interventions 4. The UK has now adopted this tool to help tackle and reduce the rates of diabetes.

The NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme, which is titled 'Healthier You', aims to reduce the rates of diabetes in the UK by promoting behavioural changes. The aim is to educate participants as well as targeting key lifestyle factors which may increase the risk of developing diabetes for those individuals. The programme involves four stages, which essentially include assessment of the service users health and wellbeing, education on health and wellbeing via joining certain groups, and a review to check any progress made. The programme will aim to tailor its services to the service users lifestyle. There is a criteria that has to be met in order to use the service and a referral is required. 5

The east London area, including Tower Hamlets and other neighbouring boroughs were one of the first 27 areas of the country to have trialled out the 'Healthier You' programme, which started in 2016. It remains unknown as to whether the programme has any impact on reducing rates of diabetes in the area. Due to its diverse community and large population of Bangladeshi's in Tower Hamlets, this may provide a different challenge for diabetes prevention via the 'Healthier You' programme compared to the rest of the country.

Obesity is a significant risk factor for the development of diabetes. The Tower Hamlets Council acknowledges its high rates of diabetes alongside its rising levels of obesity, has therefore agreed to make significant changes in order to reduce those rates. The council signed the Local Government Declaration on Sugar Reduction and Healthier Food in 2017, which is an initiative to help promote healthier eating and reduce rates of obesity, including childhood obesity. 6

Falling in line with this initiative, the mayor of Tower Hamlets, John Biggs, has recently urged local schools to take up on the ‘Sugar Smart’ initiative created by Jamie Oliver to battle childhood obesity. The aim of this campaign is to promote schools to reduce the amount of sugar that is used in the food they provide at the school. 7

The Tower Hamlets council has also made other pledges to improve health and reduce obesity rates. These include: to tackle advertising and sponsorship, offering healthy choices at public events, inclusion of sugary drinks levy on sales at council-run canteens, provide clearer information of sugar content of food and drinks, provide information on how to get more physically active. 6, 7

UK has just recently employed the ‘sugar tax’. The primary aim of this is to prevent the rising numbers of childhood obesity. This will no doubt reduce the rates of diabetes. Manufacturers are expected to lower the level of sugar content in their drinks to avoid falling foul of the levy. If manufacturers decide to absorb the levy, then consumers are likely to see an increase in the price they pay for these drinks. 8

3. What do you think are the major challenges faced by health organisation tackling diabetes amongst the local population?

4. From your experience during this elective, what improvements could be made in order to treat diabetes as well as reduce the incidence of diabetes in Tower Hamlets / East London?

As mentioned above, preventing diabetes in Tower Hamlets will provide a whole new challenge. Due to its diverse population and particularly high numbers of Bangladeshi’s, health care groups/organisations involved in diabetes prevention in Tower Hamlets will need to adopt a different approach compared to the rest of the UK.

We are continuing to learn more and more about the culture of Bangladeshis as well as the health beliefs. Gaining more information about the specific lifestyles and diet will help us tailor the prevention packages to suit the local population. However, this is easier said than done. There will have to be necessary steps in order to try and engage as many people as possible, with education playing a very important role.

While the local council has decided to take steps to decrease the incidence of childhood obesity, there are still other obvious issues that need to be acknowledged and targeted. For instance, the numerous fast food restaurants throughout Tower Hamlets have not been dealt with adequately enough. Majority of these restaurants offer very cheap deals for large meals. Most of their canned fizzy drinks are sugar filled and imported from overseas. Therefore, the sugar tax does not affect them. These are generally the 'go-to' places for most of the children after school and is likely a major contributor to the rising obesity rates amongst the young population in Tower Hamlets.

Most long term conditions require a certain level of self-care in order to halt or delay the progression of the condition. Diabetes is one such condition that in fact requires maximal self-care from the patient. Education plays an important role when it comes to self-care and so I personally feel there should be a huge emphasis on educating patients. This is what the diabetes prevention programme will aim to do. Educating second or third generation South-Asians, including Bangladeshi's, may prove to be an easier task as it may be easier to engage with this population without having a language barrier.