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Comment

Guiding girls on weight



Arya M. Sharma, MD

Guest Columnist

Anyone interested in promoting the health of young girls is faced with a seemingly impossible challenge. On one hand, in recent years we have seen a dramatic increase in the incidence of eating disorders — now one of the most common and dangerous chronic conditions in young women. On the other hand, the obesity epidemic has also adversely affected girls and women, with unprecedented numbers developing excess weight and related health issues, ranging from polycystic ovary syndrome and infertility to Type 2 diabetes and sleep apnea.

While those concerned about eating disorders are careful to not reinforce a negative focus on body

weight, those concerned about obesity are unsure how to broach this issue without further diminishing self-esteem. There is clearly concern about the unintended harmful consequences from overweight and obesity prevention initiatives, particularly those delivered in schools. But overemphasis on weight or group weigh-ins can trigger fat prejudice, weight-based teasing, or the ostracizing of larger children, or, cause children to react to healthy eating messages by adopting extreme approaches to dieting and consequently losing weight to a degree that negatively impacts their health.

Perhaps the common ground lies in recognizing both eating disorders and obesity as psychosocial health issues. At one end of

SunnySide

the spectrum girls and young women seek to control their weight by resorting to extreme dieting, excessive exercise and other destructive behaviours. At the other end, girls and young women turn to food to cope with negative emotions, stress, boredom, abandonment, emotional neglect and isolation.

Now, the Girl Guides of Canada have taken up the challenge of dealing with negative body image by introducing the Love Yourself Challenge badge, which girls aged five to 17 can earn by completing tasks that promote self-esteem, healthy eating and a positive body image.

Whether this initiative will indeed help to reduce

the risk of eating disorders while promoting healthy weight remains to be seen. Increased self-esteem is clearly beneficial whether you are dealing with under- or overweight people.

The societal causes of eating disorders and obesity may well be the same: Media, advertising, disintegration of nuclear families, lack of role models, loss of control over an excessively demanding, stressful and fast-paced society that takes little time to play, eat or reflect on the things that truly matter in life.

Let us hope that the Girl Guides' approach can manage to help girls walk the fine line between pathological dieting and numbing their emotions with food.

If it can help dissociate self-esteem from body weight, much will have been won.

Dr. Arya M. Sharma is a professor of medicine at the University of Alberta. He blogs regularly on obesity and related health issues at www.drsharma.ca.



Girl Guides of Canada
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Views

Tamils should consider course correction

David Jejaraj

Guest Columnist

Toronto is home to the largest concentration of Sri Lankan Tamils (250,000 plus) outside that island.

Thousands of Tamil Canadians, mainly youths, have participated in rallies, processions, vigils, street demonstrations, sit-ins, fasts, slogan shouting, and the blocking of traffic at peak hours.

Primarily, it is an effort to draw attention to the worsening humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka.

More than 50,000 Tamil civilians are trapped on a coastal strip in the north.

They are virtual hostages of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an organization proscribed as "terrorist" by Canada.

After fighting for

decades, the armed forces are poised to overrun the cornered Tigers.

The Tamil Tigers, as they are known, are waging a fierce war to establish an independent state, "Tamil Eelam."

Protests in Toronto and Ottawa are but part of a concerted global campaign by the Tamil diaspora.

The underlying cause is the civilian predicament back "home."

There are daily reports of civilians being killed and injured by aerial bombardment and artillery shelling. Nearly 200,000 civilians were recently displaced and are housed in camps under abysmal conditions.

In this situation, the concern and anxiety of Canadian Tamils for their kith

and kin are understandable. They want Ottawa to exert pressure on Sri Lanka and prevent the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe.

Problematic here are the methods adopted to bring about intervention by the Canadian government.

Strident protests are becoming a public nuisance.

Motorists and pedestrians are inconvenienced greatly.

Demonstrators are increasingly on a collision

course with police. Besieging the Gardiner Expressway Sunday was dangerously controversial.

Instead of winning sympathy from mainstream Toronto, the abrasive protests are incurring resentment and hostility.

Complicating matters further is the identification with the banned LTTE

— carrying Tiger flags and chanting slogans for the LTTE raise doubts about a hidden agenda.

Are the protests concerned about the civilian plight alone or getting a reprieve for the LTTE also?

In any case, linking the protests to the Tigers is proving counterproductive as neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals want to be identified with a banned outfit.

There is also the fact that Canada has little clout with Sri Lanka.

We are not a major trading partner or aid-giver. And Canada is not on the UN security council.

Perhaps it's time for Canadian Tamils to review the situation realistically and do a course correction.

David Jejaraj is a Tamil Canadian of Sri Lankan origin. He is a freelance journalist based in Toronto and has a blog (www.dbsjejaraj.com).

MULRONEY'S SEAT ON THE FIRST TWO DAYS OF HIS TESTIMONY:



MULRONEY'S SEAT FOR THE REMAINDER OF HIS TESTIMONY:



After metro

MICHAEL DE ADLER

Letters

Wake up David Caplan!

We are not the United States

Re: Premier defends eHealth spending

What is wrong with our (provincial) Health Minister David Caplan?

Why would any sane person compare U.S. President Barack Obama's \$50 billion on eHealth with Ontario?

May I remind the honourable minister that

Canada is not the United States and Obama is not our president (unfortunately). We are a nation

of approximately 30 million people, while the U.S. is a nation of 300 million people. Of course it is justified for the

Americans to have a larger budget on everything.

They

have a larger tax base.

I'm tired of the myopic view of our ministers these days. Everyone seems to be jumping on the bandwagon of, "Obama is doing this, or saying that, so what's wrong if I do the same."

Excuse me, but we are a separate, sovereign country with our own issues and policies regarding those issues.

Please learn to listen to the pulse of the people, Mr. Caplan, and own up that this

agency, like many other government agencies, is providing very little value at our tax expense.

NABEEL HASAN, OAKVILLE

David Caplan

Metro Online Poll Results

33% SAID YES

Do you find political attack ads effective?

Weigh in on today's question at metronews.ca

67% SAID NO

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