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Editorial

Diabetes: A multi-systemic disease

The African Journal of Diabetes Medicine (AJDM) does not often publish research from outside Africa, but in this issue we report a study from India demonstrating reduced pulmonary function in patients with diabetes (Philips S et al. Pulmonary function abnormalities and type 2 diabetes – a cross-sectional study). The standard organ-specific complications of diabetes affect the eye, peripheral nerves, kidney and large vessels. However, we know that other body systems can be affected – for example the gastro-intestinal tract (diabetic diarrhoea, gastropathy), skin (diabetic dermopathy, necrobiosis), urogenital tract (erectile dysfunction, orgasmic disorders), and the central nervous system (cognitive impairment).

The paper by Dr Philip and colleagues demonstrates reduced pulmonary function tests in patients with type 2 diabetes compared to non-diabetic controls. Interestingly, on multivariate analysis the risk factors included age, body mass index (BMI), and female sex; but not diabetes. This suggests that there may be other diabetes-related factors leading to pulmonary dysfunction.

We can conclude that diabetes is truly a multi-systemic disorder. Presumably this operates by microangiopathy, but there is clearly much more to be learnt of the exact causation, and the specific risk factors which may increase risk.

*Professor Geoff Gill
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