

WCPT speaks up for physical activity at WHO obesity meeting

WCPT was represented at a World Health Organization meeting on preventing childhood obesity, held in Geneva in December. The forum and technical meeting brought together academics and government officials from across all WHO regions, as a first step in developing recommendations on population-based strategies to prevent childhood obesity.

Anders Raustorp, senior lecturer in physical education at Linnaeus University Kalmar and a member of the Swedish Association of Registered Physiotherapists, attended all three days of the meeting on behalf of WCPT, alongside 50 other delegates. Many of the representatives were from the nutrition and public health side. "We few in the physical activity area were important," he says. "Speaking up for physical activity, and not just food, as a fundamental factor for weight control was necessary several times during these days."

The event was organised against a background of childhood obesity increasing worldwide, with more than 22 million children globally classified as overweight in 2005. Excessive weight is associated with many non-communicable diseases and also conditions such as depression and low self-esteem. The meeting aimed to discuss and review: the determinants for childhood obesity; current policies and programmes for population-based prevention of childhood obesity; roles and responsibilities for stakeholders in population-based strategies to prevent childhood obesity.

"There was information of ongoing projects in the world dealing with childhood obesity prevention, with presenters from Oman, France, UK, Benin, Caribbean, Vanatu and Chile," says Anders Raustorp.

There was background information to the meeting and lectures on the social and environmental determinants of childhood obesity, and the documents and resolutions supporting the meeting. Working group discussions examined surveillance planning for programmes, planning, working with non-governmental stakeholders, and obesity and social inequality.

In the surveillance group session, Anders Raustorp supported the use of objective measurement, rather than questionnaires, to measure activity level.

"Children with disabilities were also discussed in plenary sessions since they are especially vulnerable to develop obesity," he says. "We made very clear that physiotherapists have to be involved in these children's obesity prevention by adapting physical activity, stressing the need for physical educators to work with physiotherapists where possible."

Anders Raustorp also participated in a working group on the supportive school environment. Against a background of evidence that schools are a very important arena for obesity prevention, he stated that physical activity interventions had to be well balanced.

Finally, the delegates decided on priority actions. They will be consulted on the final versions of these actions, and when accepted they will inform WHO draft guidelines for population-based approaches to childhood obesity

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prevention.

“These were intensive but interesting days,” says Anders Raustorp. “I did my best to emphasise physical activity and the importance of health professionals with expertise in physical activity when it comes to prevention of childhood obesity. It was an honour to represent WCPT.”

