

Wear the willow is bad for your health

Editorial

by

Van Oyen H¹

The economic downfall dominated the last months of 2008. All economic reports indicate that the coming years will be difficult. There is no doubt that the economic crisis will affect the health and well-being of populations as the unemployment rate and poverty rate are likely to increase. The economic depression will challenge the equitable distribution of health. The economic hardship will also burden households resulting in an increasing risk of divorce. Breaking up is never easy. However there is more to it than the ABBA song as is shown by Bronselaer et al (1). Divorce has an impact on both the psychological and physical health of the ex-partners. Contrary to the make-believe of TV soap series, the negative impact of divorce on health may also be long-lasting, especially as a result of a reduced availability of social support and a deteriorated financial situation. These two observations are a potential entry for policy intervention. In their paper the authors pay attention to the complexity of the topic and the difficulties in distinguishing between a selection effect and causation effect. Much less is known about the outcomes of separation among people cohabiting without being formally married. As within the household types, the proportion of cohabiting increases, the consequences of separation among these couples should be included in future research.

In a second paper, the sodium intake in Belgium is evaluated using data from the national food consumption survey. High sodium intake is associated with high blood pressure and an increased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke. In almost all men and close to half of the women the usual sodium intake exceeded the recommended sodium intake of the World health Organisation (2). Cereals and especially bread contributed to most of the sodium intake. This will allow focusing on the reduction of the sodium in these products. However a correct balance related to the follow-up of the iodine status of the population and consumer acceptance of sodium-reduced foods should also be considered. In this paper, much attention is also given to the methodological limitations, which most likely resulted in an underestimation of the usual sodium intake.

In the third paper, the role of the physician in disability management and the interaction toward insurance and workplace actors is discussed (3). The role of the physician in disability management is important given its impact on the health outcome of the patient. Sick leave is a complex phenomenon which asks for a multidisciplinary approach, including communication with the actor in the workplace and the insurance.

¹ Scientific Institute of Public Health, Brussels

In the last chapters of the book 'The development of modern Epidemiology', presented in this issue, the development of epidemiology in several countries is discussed. Both academic education and field training have been very important in this regard. We can only hope that the reforms within the medical faculties of the Belgian universities following the Bologna Declaration will result in an enhanced focus on epidemiology and public health. There is some evidence that this may already be the case in the French-speaking universities, but the same process has not yet been developed in the Flemish Region.

References

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