

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Rebecca Piccolo, PhD
rebecca.piccolo@lshtm.ac.uk
or
John McKinlay, PhD
jmckinlay@neriscience.com

Type 2 Diabetes: Socioeconomics Play a Key Role in Amplifying Racial/Ethnic Disparities

Watertown, MA, May, 3, 2016 – Racial/ethnic minorities, particularly African Americans and Hispanic Americans are widely believed to have a higher risk of type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM). Research has frequently identified obesity as a key factor in this increased risk among racial/ethnic minorities. Lifestyle factors like health dietary habits and physical activity certainly contribute to disparities in diabetes diagnoses among different ethnic groups. However, a recent analysis published in the journal *Diabetes Care* found that socioeconomic factors like income and education may play a key role in diabetes risk among African American and Hispanic adults.

The reasons why racial/ethnic minorities are at greater risk of T2DM are complicated and not fully understood. Some researchers argue that genetics play a key role while others argue that lifestyle factors leading to obesity are of primary importance. A federally-funded study conducted at New England Research Institutes (NERI), in partnership with physicians at Massachusetts General Hospital and the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, set out to examine these questions. The researchers conducted a community-based study of men and women from three self-identified racial/ethnic groups (non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, non-Hispanic White). The participants provided blood samples to examine biological and genetic factors and answered questionnaires about their lifestyle, psychological stressors, residential environment, and socioeconomic factors. Using the data from these comprehensive measures of the risk factors for T2DM, results suggest the long-standing observation that racial and ethnic minorities have higher rates of T2DM is primarily due to socioeconomic factors such as income and education levels. The results also demonstrated that while lifestyle factors like diet, physical activity and obesity were associated with T2DM risk, these factors could not explain the excess T2DM risk among African Americans and Hispanic individuals. Lifestyle factors appeared to be heavily influenced by socioeconomic factors rather than by race/ethnicity. In other words, having limited economic means likely limits opportunities to practice healthy lifestyle habits which in turn can affect T2DM risk.

The new study has important public health policy implications, says NERI Senior Vice President and senior author John McKinlay, PhD.

“Like the old joke about looking for lost keys in the wrong location, we continue to look in the wrong direction for the causes of diabetes disparities,” he says. “We continue to put emphasis on diet and exercise. However, if the real culprits are socioeconomic then changes in social policies offer promising opportunities to mitigate the ever widening disparities in the prevalence of disease and disparities in health care for type 2 diabetes.”

NERI is a global, privately-held specialty Contract Research Organization providing customized clinical trial solutions and patient registry services to pharmaceutical, biotechnology, biomaterial and medical device companies. NERI also has extensive experience collaborating on federally-funded research with organizations like the National Institutes of Health. Since its founding in 1986, NERI has earned widespread recognition for its scientific credibility, efficiency, and expertise in conducting clinical trials in a variety of medical specialties. For more information, visit www.neriscience.com.

#