

Faculty of Science & Health
School of Nursing
Research Officer (16 month contract until 31st July 2012)
Project: The cost of obesity and overweight in Ireland

This is a SAFEFOOD funded project running for 18 months from 1st February 2011 to 31st July 2012. The project aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the cost of overweight and obesity on the island of Ireland. Costs will be measured from the perspective of a publicly funded health service in relation to health and social care costs but it will also examine costs associated with time lost at work due to ill health associated with overweight and obesity. A thorough review of the existing international literature on the costs of overweight and obesity will be carried out and will inform our methods. The project is a collaboration between a number of different groups on the island of Ireland, led by Prof. Ivan Perry, Dept. of Epidemiology and Public Health, in UCC.

There is a vacancy for a Research Officer to work with Anthony Staines and Mary Rose Sweeney, in the School of Nursing, in Dublin City University. This person will be based in DCU in Dublin, but will also do some work with Linda Sharp in the National Cancer Registry in Cork, and with Kevin Balanda at the Institute for Public Health (in Dublin or Belfast). This person will have strong quantitative skills, and might have a background in public health, epidemiology, nutrition or health economics.

Project objective

The key objectives of the project are:-

- To undertake a thorough review of the literature on the cost of overweight and obesity internationally
- To determine the direct medical costs of overweight and obesity in the Republic of Ireland, from a public health care payer perspective
- To determine the direct medical costs of overweight and obesity in Northern Ireland, from the NHS perspective.
- To determine the cost of overweight and obesity in the Republic of Ireland due to sickness absence and premature mortality.
- To determine the cost of overweight and obesity in Northern Ireland due to sickness absence and premature mortality.
- To examine the combined medical and lost production costs associated with overweight and obesity and examine variations in this across illnesses and jurisdictions.
- To provide a probabilistic sensitivity analysis on the cost estimates to represent the uncertainties associated with them.
- By combining the costs, to give a cost of overweight and obesity on the island of Ireland from a societal perspective (but not including personal out of pocket expenses or any wider losses e.g., pain and suffering etc.).
- Based on the findings, to make recommendations on further studies needed to inform a policy agenda intended to address overweight and obesity on the island of Ireland, in order to maximise the value of the information obtained in this study.

Who are we?

This project is led by Ivan Perry in UCC. Anne Dee is the lead researcher. Other partners include Ciarán O'Neill from NUI Galway, Frank Kee from QUB, Linda Sharp from the National Cancer Registry, Kevin Balanda from the Institute of Public Health, and Anthony Staines and Mary-Rose Sweeney from DCU.

The Post

We are looking for someone to work on the project. You will need strong quantitative skills, and you might have a background in public health, epidemiology, nutrition or health economics. You will work mostly with the DCU group and with Linda Sharp and Kevin Balanda. You will work on estimating the indirect costs of overweight and obesity in the Republic of Ireland. You will work closely with another research fellow doing the same work for Northern Ireland in NUI Galway. A literature review is being carried out, led by Anne Dee, but you will use the results of this.

The project will use a wide array of data sources. These will be identified, informed by the literature review, access secured, and methods for data extraction agreed. These include hospital records (HIPE) in the Republic of Ireland, and NISRA data in Northern Ireland, supplemented with data collected in surveys such as SLAN, TILDA, the Cork & Kerry Diabetes & Heart Disease Study, the Northern Ireland Health and Wellbeing Survey, The Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey and the Eurobarometer. Prescribing data collected by BSO will be used for Northern Ireland, and data on prescriptions collected by PCRS, and HSE hospital pharmacy data used for the Republic of Ireland. Social welfare illness and disability claims data from both jurisdictions will be examined in the estimation of productivity lost due to time off work.

Direct healthcare costs: In assessing health care costs, a bottom up approach is preferable but this is unlikely to be feasible, as there are severe difficulties in estimating costs in the Irish health care system. For each illness the activities associated with its treatment will be identified, a vector of unit costs associated with these activities calculated, then multiplied and aggregated. Where local unit cost data are unavailable, UK sources (or costs from other comparable countries) will be used, adjusted using purchasing power parity and inflation data. Where possible a bottom up approach to costing will be adopted, using hospital records (HIPE/NISRA) supplemented with data collected in surveys such as SLAN, TILDA, the Northern Ireland Health and Wellbeing Survey and the Eurobarometer. For Northern Ireland prescribing data collected by BSO will be used and for the Republic of Ireland data collected by PCRS. A consistent methodology using bottom up methods where possible, augmented by a top-down approach to cost using attributable fractions where required, will be agreed and used throughout the study for data collected in both jurisdictions.

Non healthcare costs: Non healthcare costs will focus on lost production. These will be more difficult to measure, as data on social welfare sickness payments are not recorded classified by condition in electronic format in the Republic of Ireland. For this part of the study it is expected that a random sample of anonymised social welfare claims for the Republic for illness benefit and disability claims will be made manually, in order to give an estimate of the frequency of various conditions. As conditions are recorded in many cases by disease group rather than individual conditions, it may be necessary to make some estimates based on the known epidemiology of the conditions in Ireland, and data collected for the direct cost part of the study, and from Northern Ireland social welfare data. Productivity losses due to premature mortality will

be calculated based on mortality data, and attributable fractions calculated for the direct medical cost part of the study. A friction cost approach will be adopted to the calculation of productivity losses associated with time off work. Adjustments will be made for differences in the cost of living using purchasing power parity.

Uncertainty in the data: A critical part of our work will be providing estimates of the precision of our costs estimates, both overall, and for each major element. Where parametric statistical analysis of the data is possible, this will be done with expert statistical help from the various collaborating departments. Where parametric statistical analysis of the data is not appropriate, probabilistic sensitivity analysis will be performed using simulations.

The Person

Essential features are:-

- You will have a minimum of a degree in a relevant area with significant experience and preferably a higher degree in a relevant discipline (preferably a PhD, but strong candidates with an MSc will be considered)
- You will have substantial experience of public health research
- You will have good evidence of strong quantitative skills including skills in data handling, data abstraction, and data analysis
- You will have evidence of excellent computer skills
- You will have clear evidence of good inter-personal skills
- Excellent communication skills, both written and oral are essential for this position.

Desirable features:-

- Experience of work on costing studies
- Training in health economics

The post will involve some travel to work with our partners outside Dublin.

Informal enquiries to: Prof. Anthony Staines, DCU. E-mail: anthony.staines@dcu.ie or
Dr. Mary Rose Sweeney, DCU. E-mail: maryrose.sweeney@dcu.ie

Salary Scale:

€37,750 - €42,394 pa Postdoctoral Researcher

€21,850 - €32,930 pa Research Assistant

Subject to qualifications & experience.

This Salary Scale may be affected by the provisions of the 2011 budget.

Closing Date: Friday 4th February 2011

Application forms are available from:

Application forms and job description are available at: www.dcu.ie/vacancies/current.shtml

and from Human Resources Department, Dublin City University, Dublin 9.

Tel: +353 (0)1 700 5149 Fax: +353 (0)1 700 5500 E-mail: hr.applications@dcu.ie

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