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**TAXING FATNESS**

From the beginning of time epidemics have created havoc. Plague and pestilence have always been swift, invisible agents of death. In the new millennium we confront a new epidemic — Excess Adipose Tissue (EAT) — which is highly visible, less swift in outcome, but just as deadly.

In Australia, the EAT epidemic is spreading. Presently, 60% of adult Australians are overweight and 21% are obese. More troubling is the fact that 18% of Australian boys and 21% of girls are also afflicted, and on track for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension and premature death.

Since the advent of EAT, we have witnessed a cavalcade of task forces, obesity summits and strategy statements. Our litigious culture has the international “fast food” giants in its sights, and lawyers are aggressive in pursuing class actions. Sadly, our governments have responded by promoting poorly resourced strategies.

Leading the world in EAT is the United States, where it costs taxpayers more than \$US 90 billion each year. A recent editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* noted: “Every so often, some government agency pronounces Americans are fat and getting fatter. The bureaucrats make the pitch for more federal dollars to promote obesity awareness and prevention. Obesity awareness? Please. The ideal obesity awareness tool has already been invented. It’s called a mirror.” As a solution, the editorial proposes a “Weight-Added Tax . . . Every year, at your accountant’s office, you weigh in. If you weigh more than the ideal for your height, weight and age, you pay a tax, depending on how much you’ve packed on in the preceding year. If you weigh less, you get a tax break.”

Whether such a tax would be accepted is uncertain.

What is certain is that EAT, if not tackled, will surely tax future health budgets.

*Martin B Van Der Weyden*

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