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The Metabolic Syndrome and Cancer Project (Me-Can): the rationale and ambitions

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Abstract Text:

The metabolic syndrome includes several metabolic risk factors, which have, separately and jointly, been associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases. About the association with cancer risk little is known to date. Therefore, in 2006 the Metabolic syndrome and Cancer project (Me-Can) was initiated to create a large pooled cohort of existing cohorts in Norway, Austria, and Sweden, that is: the Oslo study I (Oslo), the Norwegian Counties Study (NCS), the Cohort of Norway (CONOR), the Age 40-programme (40-year cohort), the Vorarlberg Health Monitoring and Prevention Programme (VHM&PP), the Västerbotten Intervention Project (VIP), and the Malmö Preventive Project (MPP).

Measurements of height, weight and systolic and diastolic blood pressure were available, as well as levels of glucose, total cholesterol and triglycerides. Besides, additional data concerned age, sex, smoking and fasting status, relevant dates, diagnoses and follow-up status including death.

Various statistical methods were to be applied to get the most out of the data and to assure valid results. Among others, in the Cox proportional hazard regression analyses reverse causation and regression dilution bias were dealt with. Also, the exposure variables were studied in quintiles and as standardised variables to ascertain the combined effect of metabolic factors.

The strength of this pooled approach is particularly the large amount of subjects in population-based surveys and a nearly complete coverage of data. Also, there was information on repeated measurements and a high-quality follow-up. As for the weaknesses, unfortunately data on several potential confounders, tumour characteristics, and treatment are lacking.

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