Letter to the Editor

The International Society of Tropical Paediatrics (ISTP) endorses the redefinition of fatty liver disease

To the Editor:

We read with great interest the article by Dr. Nan and colleagues which presents the statement of the Chinese Society of Hepatology’s endorsement of the comprehensive proposal for the redefinition of fatty liver disease in adults and children. In this letter, the International Society of Tropical Paediatrics (ISTP) joins this statement and announces their endorsement of the new term and definition for metabolic dysfunction-associated fatty liver disease (MAFLD).

ISTP was founded in 1986 and is an affiliate of the International Paediatric Association (IPA). The primary focus for ISTP is the promotion of paediatric disease knowledge in tropical and sub-tropical countries to help improve the health of children in these regions, which have some of the highest global prevalences of obesity and MAFLD.

The former term, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) was problematic in children, as it does not make any sense to include ‘alcohol’ in the name when conveying information to parents. In addition, NAFLD was defined solely based on the exclusion of other causes of chronic liver disease, with experts raising concerns about the potential risk of over diagnosis and excessive investigations.

In contrast, the new definition of fatty liver disease provides a comprehensive, simple, and practical approach for the diagnosis of fatty liver disease in children and adults and takes into consideration the heterogeneity of fatty liver disease. It provides simple criteria for the diagnosis of MAFLD based on the presence of metabolic dysfunction, that it is intimately implicated in the pathogenesis of fatty liver disease. In addition, it distinguishes MAFLD from fatty liver with other identifiable systemic disorders, including malnutrition and on the other hand brings the attention to the need for further studies to clarify the pathogenic basis of fatty liver without a clear underlying defect. This definition indicates the potential coexistence of more than one cause of chronic liver disease and means that clinicians are not compelled to search for rare causes of fatty liver, but can instead follow their own clinical judgement.

The adoption of this change would have strong positive implications in the battle to combat fatty liver disease at numerous levels. The simplicity of the MAFLD criteria, which can be easily incorporated (without extra costs) into standard healthcare packages would improve the detection of this disease, particularly in the primary care setting, and would allow for efficient referral and multidisciplinary management.

In conclusion, the ISTP joins the Chinese Society of Hepatology and considers the new definition of fatty liver disease by Eslam et al. in adults and children a pivotal step in our ongoing efforts to increase the awareness and enhance the prevention and management of MAFLD.

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Conflict of interest

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Authors’ contributions

All authors contributed to conceptualisation, drafting and revision of the manuscript.

Supplementary data

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References


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