Advancing Effective Obesity Communications Workshop

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

A Patient Perspective: Cutting Through the Noise

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Even More Noise!
What do we rarely hear?

• Explanations of the physiology/biology of weight

• Weight is a long-term issue

• How healthcare providers can help
People in higher weight bodies are:

- “Less than” in society
- Failures for not controlling their weight
More
Subtle
Unintentional Stigma
Perceptions of Obesity

% that believe obesity “is a disease”

- People with obesity: 65%
- Health care professionals: 80%

Why don’t people with obesity seek treatment?

According to people with obesity

REASON #1
Managing my weight is my own responsibility

REASON #2
Know what is needed to manage my weight

Variety of Viewpoints

Fat Acceptance/NAAFA®
- Mission to eliminate discrimination based on body size and provide fat people with the tools for self-empowerment through public education, advocacy, and support.

Body Positivity
- Accepting and loving your body just as it is
- Celebrating diversity of all body weights, shapes and sizes

Obesity Action Coalition
- Obesity is a disease
- Obesity matters to health

Health at Every Size®
- Weight ≠ health or disease
- Framing “obesity” as a disease leads to more stigma
- Focuses on intuitive eating rather than on dieting
It is so damaging that doctors say you're fat, YouTubers say you're lazy, and fat acceptance says your fat is fine, you're not sick! I joined that movement and ignored an obvious issue for half a decade because I was being taught society was wrong and my body was fine.
Weight bias, stigma, and discrimination harm higher weight people and must be eliminated.
“Implying that individuals are largely in control of and responsible for their body size (and therefore cancer) supports a culture of blame and plays into prejudices and negative stereotypes which drive the social exclusion, marginalisation, and inequality of an already stigmatised population.”
Cultural Differences

Trust for America’s Health Report

*The State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America 2019*

- People at lower incomes and people of color at higher risk
- Latino and black adults had highest rates
Cultural Differences – An Example

Shape Program – Weight Gain Prevention Study

- Most participants socioeconomically disadvantaged black women
- Told not a weight-loss program
- Tailored behavior change goals; weekly self-monitoring via interactive voice response (IVR) telephone calls; 12 counseling calls delivered monthly by a trained registered dietitian; tailored skills training materials; and a 12-month YMCA membership.

Result: at 12 months 62% of participants at or below baseline weights. Also observed decrease in depression.

“Promoting weight loss is a challenge in all populations, but it has been consistently and disproportionately more onerous among black women. It is clear that new treatment approaches, such as weight gain prevention, are necessary to contend with the considerable challenge of obesity in this population.”

Bennett, Gary et al., Behavioral Treatment for Weight Gain Prevention Among Black Women in Primary Care Practice, JAMA Internal Medicine Volume 173, No. 19 (2013)
In the News: HBO’s Real Time with Bill Maher

“Being fat isn’t a birth defect. No one comes out of the womb needing to buy two seats on an airplane”

“Fat shaming doesn’t need to end. It needs to make a comeback.”

“Some amount of shame is good.”
“Fat shaming never went anywhere. Ask literally any fat person. We are reminded of it all the time.”

“There’s a common and insulting misconception that fat people are stupid and lazy and we’re not.”

“I’ve struggled my entire life trying to manage my weight. . . a struggle I will face the rest of my life.”

“Fat shaming is just bullying... and bullying only makes the problem worse. I don’t think stuff like this is going to solve the obesity epidemic.”

“If making fun of fat people made them lose weight, there’d be no fat kids in schools.”
Finding ways to cut through the noise is important.

Cultural differences are important.

All communications must avoid further stigmatizing people with obesity.

Organizations may find common ground in anti-stigma issues.

Understanding and conveying the real experiences of people with obesity is powerful.
Thank you!

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Obesity Action Coalition
www.ObesityAction.org

National Obesity Care Week
www.ObesityCareWeek.org