

INFORMING PATIENTS ABOUT THE RISKS OF OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY - ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Abstract

Obesity is one of the most important public health issues in the modern world. It is known as risk factor for many chronic non-communicable diseases such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease, various cancers, diseases of the musculoskeletal system, mental illness, etc. It is also chronic disease itself. A wide range of medical professionals are involved in the treatment and control of overweight and obesity - general practitioners, endocrinologists, nutritionists, psychologists, health care professionals, bariatric surgeons, pediatricians, etc. Communication plays an essential role in both prevention and treatment of obesity. In this paper we review the literature to identify the causes and difficulties for physicians to inform their patients about the risk of overweight.

Medical professionals with different specialties often pay attention to the underlying disease and avoid addressing patient's overweight as significant risk factor. Bad attitudes towards people with obesity are well known. In Durrer and Schutz's model for managing overweight and obesity, communication (through a motivational interview) and patient education are central. However, in Bulgaria not much attention is paid to medical communication. We emphasize the need to develop additional recommendations for ethical attitude towards obese patients that could be helpful for medical staff to communicate risks of obesity without promoting stigma.

Patient centered care involves understanding the needs and values of the patient, which could be achieved through the application of various communication techniques. Continuing education in obesity management and medical communication is important in order to improve medical results and patients' satisfaction.

Key words: *Communication, Obesity, Risk factors, Healthcare professionals.*