

Divergence of patient and clinician perceptions of obesity and weight management

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Background: Obesity is a chronic disease associated with significant morbidity, for which few affected individuals receive adequate medical care. The ACTION (**A**wareness, **C**are & **T**reatment **I**n **O**besity **M**anagement) study was designed to identify barriers reported by people with obesity (PWO) and clinicians that may hinder the initiation of such care.

Methods: Focus groups including 43 PWO (class I: N=14; class II: N=13; class III: N=16) and individual interviews with 24 clinicians (12 primary care providers and 12 obesity specialists) were conducted, transcribed, and coded thematically.

Results: 75% of PWO perceived themselves as 'healthy,' although nearly three-quarters had obesity-related comorbidities. While PWO and clinicians considered obesity a combination of disease and lifestyle, their primary emphases differed widely; 65% of PWO considered obesity primarily a lifestyle issue, and 88% of clinicians considered it a disease. Motivation was perceived as a key barrier to weight loss by both PWO and clinicians (77% vs 75%, respectively); limited patient understanding of their condition less so (35% vs 42%). Relative to clinicians, PWO more often cited barriers of food habits (88% vs 38%), social relationships (79% vs 38%) and feeling deprived while dieting (56% vs 8%), and less often cited limited patient understanding of how to lose weight (9% vs 58%). Importantly, PWO indicated that developing health complications or receiving a "wake-up call" in relation to their health would motivate them to address their obesity.

Conclusions: Perceptions of obesity appear to vary between PWO and clinicians. This discordance may be a barrier to effective communication and treatment, and thus contribute to suboptimal patient-clinician interactions. This qualitative association provides the basis for quantitative examination of these perceptions and their causes, the understanding of which could enhance patient-clinician collaboration in the treatment of obesity.