Access to Care for Severe Childhood Obesity Challenges for Patients and Families

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Disclosures

• Professional fees
  – Novo Nordisk
  – Nutrisystem

• Personal biases that favor:
  – Evidence-based interventions, both prevention and treatment
  – Respect for people living with obesity
  – Critical thinking about all evidence
Presentation Objectives

• Describe the gap between:
  – Medical needs of youth with severe obesity
  – Accessible care

• Discuss reasons and potential strategies for overcoming the problem

Deseree, photograph © Garen Dibartolomeo for ConscienHealth
Obesity Is Growing
More Common Everywhere Around the World

Severe Obesity Growing Fastest
Prevalence of Childhood Obesity Is Growing Steadily

Class I Obesity

Class II Obesity

Class III Obesity

Source: Skinner et al, Obesity 2014,04
“Building on our previous work, we have been able to document the steadily rising levels of severe obesity, modeled on adult criteria of class I, II, and III obesity, with the rise of children with severe obesity having been the most significant.”

- Skinner et al, Pediatrics, 2018
But Bias Drives
Policy Decisions That Affect Clinical Care

“Prevention obviously has to be the primary strategy for dealing with obesity, because there’s just too much obesity to treat.”

Nathalie, photograph © Garen Dibartolomeo
Only 37 Clinics for 5 Million Children with Severe Obesity

Source: http://conscienhealth.org/2017/02/childhood-obesity-treatment-programs-serve-many/
The Situation is No Better Here in the U.K.

Prof Paul Gately
@profpaulgately

Replying to @Mpmok @ConscienHealth and 6 others

There is no national provision for the estimated 450k children with severe obesity in the UK. 10 yr plan suggests support for 1000, but it’s clearly not a uk priority despite the many promises. We tried to maintain services, but with no funding it’s not possible.

4:53 PM - 25 Apr 2019
Bias is an inclination or outlook to present or hold a **partial perspective**, often accompanied by a refusal to consider the possible merits of **alternative points of view**. Biases are learned implicitly within cultural contexts. People may develop biases toward or **against** an **individual**, an ethnic **group**, a nation, a religion, a social class, a political party, theoretical **paradigms** and **ideologies** within academic domains, or a species.

– Adapted from *Psychology: Contemporary Perspectives*  
Paul Okami
Two Kinds of Bias Corrupt Our Response to Obesity

• Intellectual bias favoring personal convictions
• Weight bias directed at people with obesity
People Typically View Obesity as the Result of Poor Choices

- Environment: 10%
- Choices: 20%
- Genes: 70%
Long Viewed as a Matter of Choice

• Bad personal choices was the dominant explanation in 2013
• Data from ongoing tracking
• Respondents asked to pick one

“Which phrase comes closest to describing the type of problem that you think obesity is?” (Feb 2013)

- Personal Problem, Bad Choices 44%
- Something Else 24%
- Community, Bad Food, Inactivity 24%
- Medical 18%

Source: ConscienHealth research 2013.02
The Truth Is That

Obesity is a Highly Heritable Chronic Disease

- Heredity plays a dominant role in obesity risk
- But environmental factors serve to activate it
- Then, people can choose what to do about it

Source: Musani, Erickson, and Allison, 2008, AJCN
We Used Google Consumer Surveys to Measure Beliefs About Severe Childhood Obesity

Question
• “What do you believe is the primary cause of severe obesity when it occurs in young children?”

Sample
• Total ~4,000 adults
• In the U.S., U.K., France, and Italy
• Fielded in April 2019
Poor Diet and Exercise Habits Seen as the Primary Cause, Especially in the U.K.

What do you believe is the primary cause of severe obesity when it occurs in young children?

722 respondents

- Poor diet and exercise habits: 55.5%
- Poor parenting: 18.8%
- Excessive marketing of junk food: 16.1%
- Genetics and physiology: 9.7%

Source: Google Surveys research by ConscienHealth and OAC, U.K. respondents
What do you believe is the primary cause of severe obesity when it occurs in young children?

720 respondents

- Poor diet and exercise habits: 52.7%
- Poor parenting: 20.8%
- Excessive marketing of junk food: 16.4%
- Genetics and physiology: 10.2%

Source: Google Surveys research by ConscienHealth and OAC
A Few More French Respondents Saw Problems with Junk Food Marketing

Quelle cause principale croyez-vous qui est en jeu lorsque l'obésité sévère apparaît chez de jeunes enfants?

637 respondents

- Les mauvaises habitudes... 49.9%
- La commercialisation excessive de la... 23.7%
- Les mauvaises pratiques parentales 13.9%
- La génétique et la physiologie 12.6%
Italian Respondents Saw Both Junk Food Marketing & Poor Habits as Important

Quale crede sia la principale causa di obesità grave nei bambini piccoli?

1,015 respondents

- Eccessivo marketing di cibo spazzatura: 34.8%
- Alimentazione povera e scarsa attività fisica: 32.6%
- Incapacità genitoriale: 26.9%
- Genetica e fisiologia: 5.7%

Source: Google Surveys research by ConscienHealth and OAC
“Bad Habits” Dominates the Public View

- The public attributes severe childhood obesity to poor diet and exercise habits, even in young children.
- French and especially Italian respondents have more concern about excessive junk food marketing.
- Poor parenting was less of an issue than we expected.
- Most respondents don’t see genetics and physiology as important.
The Bias Is Clear and Bias Gets in the Way of Progress

- Stigma leads to denial and inaction
  - Blame directed at people with obesity
  - Assumptions of
    - Laziness
    - Poor discipline
  - Social rejection

- People seek less care, get poor care, so health suffers

- Leads to ineffective policies
The Impact on Families and Youth Is Great

Classmate’s bullying over weight led girl, 12, to kill herself, suit claims

Updated Apr 23, 2019; Posted Apr 22, 2019

11-Year-Old Commits Suicide After Incessant Bullying Over His Weight

Phillip Spruill Jr.'s little brother was also bullied with homophobic slurs.

Written By NewsOne Staff
Posted April 12, 2019
So What We Have Is a Work in Progress
We See Progress As Health Authorities Recognize Obesity Is a Complex, Chronic Disease

*Milestones in Regarding Obesity as a Disease*

- **1977**: HCFA: "Obesity is not a disease"
- **1998**: NIH Guidelines
- **2002**: IRS Deductibility
- **2004**: Social Security
- **2006**: CMS: "Obesity is not a disease"
- **2008**: CMS Survey: Coverage
- **2012**: Obesity Society: White Paper
- **2013**: AACE: "Obesity is a disease"

Source: Kyle, Dhurandhar, and Allison, Endocrinol Metab Clin North Am, 2016.09
Explicit Public Views Are Slowly Shifting

- Fewer people think of obesity as a problem of bad personal choices
- People are shifting toward more diverse views of obesity

Source: ConscienHealth/OAC weight bias tracking research, 2017.05
Obesity Science
Is Bringing Better Insights and Solutions

• Hypothalamus controls fat mass and blood sugar
• More, better therapies on the horizon for obesity
• A growing evidence base for bariatric surgery in teens

Neurons, photograph © ZEISS Microscopy / flickr
Summary of Opportunities

Better progress will require:

• **Objectivity** to replace bias
• **Curiosity** about obesity and the people it affects
• **Care** for these people
More Information

conscienhealth.org/news
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For these slides: