How Weight Bias Amplifies Health Disparities

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Disclosure Statement

Speaker: Ted Kyle

Personal Fees:

• Gelesis
• Johnson & Johnson
• Novo Nordisk
• Nutrisystem
Presentation Objectives

• Describe how weight bias interacts with systemic racism in healthcare
• Discuss how this magnifies health disparities
• Describe needed changes

Source: Obesity Action Coalition / OAC Image Gallery
Obesity Prevalence Is Growing Relentlessly

Source: NHANES estimates
But the Growth Rates Are Disparate in Minority Populations

Trends in obesity prevalence among U.S. adolescents (ages 12-19) by race/ethnicity, 1999-2002 to 2015-2018

Source: CDC/NCHS, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey
Disparity Is Not Limited to the U.S.
Over a Lifetime, These Disparities Add Up for Black Women

Source: Yang et al, Apr 2021, doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2020167118
Racial Disparities in Healthcare Are By Design, Not Chance

- Grown from the legacy of slavery
- Disease falsely attributed to innate traits
- Basic health and sanitation denied in reconstruction
- Separate and unequal health systems
- Employment-based health insurance denied to people of color
- Healthcare became a remedy of last resort
Two Kinds of Bias Affect Our Response to Obesity

- Intellectual bias favoring personal convictions
- Weight bias directed at people with obesity
- These interact with systemic racism in healthcare

God Judging Adam, Etching by William Blake / WikiArt
What Is Weight Bias?

• Negative attitudes
  o Beliefs
  o Judgments
  o Stereotypes
  o Discriminatory acts
• Based solely on weight
• Subtle or overt
• Explicit or implicit
### Explicit Bias Is Down, But Implicit Bias Is Growing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Explicit Bias Trend 2007-2016</th>
<th>Implicit Bias Trend 2001-2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Charlesworth and Banaji, 2018, Patterns of Implicit and Explicit Attitudes, Long-Term Change and Stability From 2007 to 2016
Living with Bias & Stigma Makes People Sicker

Pathways from stress to obesity

Source: Tomiyama, 2019, Ann Rev Psych
COVID-19 Concerns for People with Obesity

- Patients avoiding healthcare
- Increased fear of being discounted
- Extreme fear of infection and hospitalization
- Concerns about changes in eating habits, exercise, weight gain
- In this context, disparities have grown
Obesity Grows from Complex, Adaptive Systems

But Bias Favors Simplistic Policy Solutions
So, Access to Effective Obesity Care Is Often Poor

- Self-Care
- Professional Lifestyle Therapy
- Pharmacotherapy
- Surgical Care
- Post Surgery Care
What’s Required to Overcome Bias and Disparities?

Progress will require:

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