

Impact of weight bias and stigma on quality of care and outcomes for patients with obesity

Healthcare professionals commonly hold stigmatising, negative beliefs and attitudes about patients living with overweight and obesity, and there is evidence to suggest that this influences person-perceptions, judgment, interpersonal behaviour and decision-making. This may, in turn, impact the medical care which is provided to patients with overweight and obesity.

The aim of this review was to determine the implications of obesity stigma for healthcare providers and their patients with obesity, and secondly to identify strategies to improve care for patients with obesity.

The authors propose a “conceptual model of hypothesized pathways whereby the associations between obesity and health outcomes are partially mediated by healthcare providers' attitudes and behaviours about obese patients, and patients' response to feeling stigmatized.”

Results suggest that experience or perceptions of stigma can cause avoidance behaviour from patients towards medical care and that stigma overall can reduce patients' quality of care. Beliefs from healthcare providers that those with overweight or obesity are less likely to comply with treatment plans and are undisciplined have also been found to reduce quality of care.

Potential strategies to address obesity stigma in clinical care include improving healthcare provider attitudes towards patients with overweight and obesity, adapting clinical environments to improve experiences of patients with obesity, and empowering patients to be able to manage stigmatising situations and achieve the best quality of healthcare possible.

Phelan, S M, et al. “Impact of Weight Bias and Stigma on Quality of Care and Outcomes for Patients with Obesity.” *Obesity Reviews*: An Official Journal of the International Association for the Study of Obesity, vol. 16, no. 4, 2015, pp. 319–26, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25752756, 10.1111/obr.12266.