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Breaking WEIGHT BIAS

**Promoting Health
without harming through
digital training tools**

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2. Weight bias in healthcare settings





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TRAINING CONTENT

Learning Objectives

By reading this module, health care professionals will:

- be able to understand the negative impact of weight bias on individuals living in a large body regarding the quality of healthcare services they receive;
- be able to recognise common manifestations of weight bias and identify harmful practices by healthcare providers;
- gain knowledge on how to approach in a sensitive manner discussion about weight with patients;
- acquire knowledge on how to create a supportive physical and social environment for people living in large bodies;
- gain knowledge on how to recognise and assess internalised weight bias;
- understand the importance of professional development in the context of providing quality healthcare services to patients who may experience or have experienced weight bias, because they live in a large body.

2. Weight bias in healthcare settings

In this section, we explore the existence, different manifestations and consequences of weight bias in healthcare settings. Several ways have been detected by relevant studies through which weight bias of healthcare professionals can impede the access of people who live in a large body to quality healthcare provision as well as affect their engagement with healthcare services. According to Alberga et al. (2019), the major ones are:

1. More often than not people with obesity encounter disrespectfulness, verbal insults, and inappropriate humour by healthcare professionals or they receive patronising advice that simplifies the process of losing weight.
2. Healthcare professionals are being seen by their patients as inadequately prepared in terms of knowledge to effectively treat and advise people with obesity.
3. Previous and recent experiences of insensitive behaviour by healthcare professionals led to people living in a large body having mixed feelings about using healthcare services.
4. People with obesity identify a tendency of health professionals to emphasise their weight over other health issues. Thus, patients often do not feel comfortable with expressing the reality of their symptoms and/or their concerns or even booking an appointment with their general practitioner due to the fact



that some healthcare professionals do not pay the proper attention to other health issues that they may have.

5. Healthcare professionals make false assumptions about the willingness and effort of their patients to lose weight.
6. Among the most frequent barriers that an individual living in a large body encounters to their access to healthcare utilisation are unwelcomed weight reduction lectures; fear of getting weighted; feeling uncomfortable with exposing their bodies and getting undressed; and inappropriate hospital equipment in terms of size, such as gowns, chairs and examination tables.
7. Individuals living in a large body often feel that healthcare professionals differentiate the care provided due to their weight.
8. The lack of trust and communication between the patients and healthcare professionals.

“However, there are strategies that can be employed in order to reduce weight bias in healthcare settings along with its consequences in the provision of healthcare for people in large bodies. These include: setting an appropriate physical environment, nurturing a positive social environment, asking for the patients’ permission to discuss weight, challenging personal and internalised weight bias of healthcare professionals HCPs, treating all patients with compassion, and continuously investing in self-evaluation and proper education” (Lee & Pausé, 2016).

Investing in ongoing self-education around weight bias is also very beneficial, as cultivating awareness and understanding is the antidote to eliminate bias and prejudice. Moreover, it is vital to consider asking for support when you feel triggered by your patients’ experiences. Empowering yourself and building resilience can have a great positive impact not only on your mental health but also on your patients.



EXTERNAL RESOURCES

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