In support of World Obesity Day

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4 March marks World Obesity Day.

Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a more than 80,000 member-strong 501(c)(3) National nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the needs of every individual affected by obesity.

Key points:

- 42% of patients are uncomfortable discussing weight with a GP
- Patients living with obesity routinely face stigma and struggle to access support.
- Health professionals have a responsibility to learn how to approach this in an effective people- centered manner during health consultations and to leverage on media platforms to spread the message.
- The OAC is encouraging all media, bloggers and others to utilize People-First Language in their writings. By utilizing People-First Language, we can further eradicate weight bias and stigma.

- Obesity is very common, affecting 1 in 6 adults and 1 in 11 children worldwide in 2020.
- Almost 100% more children around the world will be living with obesity by 2035 from 2020.
- Childhood obesity can profoundly affect physical, social and emotional wellbeing, academic performance and self- esteem. This often carries through to adolescence and into adulthood.
- Young people are never the cause of unhealthy and unstainable environments, but they are often the most impacted.
- Adult obesity is expected to increase by over 60% between 2020 and 2035.
- Alongside being a disease itself, obesity is linked to a range of adverse physical and mental health outcomes.

- Avoiding stigma is an important first step in approaching obesity.
- Labeling individuals as 'obese' creates negative feelings toward individuals with obesity and perpetuates weight bias.
- 19% of people report that they would avoid future medical appointments if their doctor stigmatized them about their weight.
- 21% of people report that they would seek a new doctor if they felt a doctor has stigmatized them about weight.
- Referring to individuals as 'obese' has been shown to influence how individuals feel about their condition and how likely they are to seek medical care.

How we as health professionals support OAC's efforts in raising awareness on their new initiative titled People- First Language:

- By using "obese," we are dehumanizing individuals affected by this disease.

  We can change the angle to express as:

  "The woman was affected by obesity." instead of **"The woman was obese."**

Words and phrases to avoid	Alternative language and considerations
x Obese person x Obese subject/participant x Obese children	√ Person/individual with obesity √ Subject/participant with obesity √ Children with obesity

Labels and adjectives used in reference to people living with obesity
Words relating to people with obesity should be carefully considered. While not everyone will react the same way, it is best to avoid using certain words as they can carry a very negative connotation to many people. It is also very important to avoid using any word that may be stigmatising, demoralising or criticising one's physical appearance.

Examples of words and phrases to avoid	Alternative language and considerations
x 'Fat' x 'Fatty' x 'Chubster' x 'Chubby' x 'Flabby' x 'Flab' x 'Supersized' x 'Mammoth' x 'Large size'	√ Neutral phrases such as 'individuals with higher weight/BMI' or 'people living with obesity' √ Use people-first language

- Understanding that obesity is more than an individual's lifestyle and food choices. The root causes of obesity run much deeper and can be genetic, psychological, sociocultural, economic and environmental.

Judgmental labels and adjectives commonly used when talking about obesity

Despite increasing evidence that obesity is caused by multiple factors, many people still see obesity as the result of individual behaviours and choices. When talking about obesity, it is not uncommon for individuals to use certain words for dramatic effect. While these are often not meant to be targeting directly a person, their use should still be avoided.

Examples of words and phrases to avoid	Alternative language and considerations
x 'Curse' x 'Strain' x 'Plague'	√ Use accurate facts and figures √ Be clear on what the problem is rather than leaving it open to interpretation √ Avoid ambiguous language √ Be explicit on the health consequence. For example, *'Obesity can affect our health in x, y and z ways.'*

Let's share our knowledge, advocate together and improve better health together.

#towardsbetterhealthoutcomes

About the author:

Dr Chrystal Fong (MBBS Melbourne, FRACGP) is currently practicing as a family physician at Asia HealthPartners under the subsidiary of Singapore Institute of Advanced Medicine (SAM) Holdings, located at Lucky Plaza, Orchard, Singapore. She has a special interest in health prevention and incorporates sports psychology and lifestyle medicine principles in her health screening and advocacy in health promotion.

Website resources

1. Obesityaction.org
2. StopWeightBias.com