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Audit Report

Surveillance of body weight in general practice

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This department carried out an audit of the surveillance of body weight in one small general practice with a stable population, which had a policy of weighing adults every three years. We tried to answer three questions: How many patients were weighed? How common was overweight? How did body weight vary with time?

How many patients were weighed?—Over seven years 252 (78%) of the 323 adults over the age of 20 in the practice population had their weight recorded at least once and 149 patients (46%) at least twice. Although only 9% of women (three out of 32) over the age of 56 had not been weighed, half of the men (20 out of 40) aged 20-35 were missed. The 149 patients who were weighed at least twice in seven

years weighed more on average (65.9 (SD 14.6) kg) than the 103 patients who were weighed only once (61.8 (12.6) kg).

How common was overweight?—Both height and weight were recorded in only 158 patients, who were heavier (65.7 (13.4) kg) than the 94 others (59.5 (12.2) kg). Body mass index (weight/height²) was calculated for these 158 patients; 43 of them were unequivocally obese (body mass index >29), and a further 57 were overweight with a body mass index of 25-29. Seventeen out of 36 (47%) women aged 20-35 but all 29 women aged over 56 were overweight or obese.

How did body weight vary with time?—Of the 149 patients whose weight was recorded twice or more, 106 (71%) showed little change while the weight of 37 (25%) changed by 10%-20% and that of six (4%), including three patients with serious diseases, changed by over 20%.

Measuring weight at every visit unless last done in the past two years will mean that most patients will have their weight measured regularly, but younger men may often be missed. For effective surveillance, however, height needs to be measured as well as weight.

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