

NEWS

GPs lack necessary tools and incentives to manage obesity, London conference hears

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London

GPs could do much more to manage obesity among their patients if they had the appropriate tools, training, and incentives, a London seminar on obesity heard last week.

The seminar, “Tackling obesity—latest on commissioning services, engaging business and encouraging healthy choices,” was organised by the Westminster Food and Nutrition Forum.

Rachel Pryke, clinical champion for nutrition for health at the Royal College of General Practitioners, told the seminar that although there was some “fabulous” guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on managing obesity, “we don’t have the implementation tools to translate that across to the workforce.”

She said that the current focus in general practice was not on managing obesity but rather on “trying to fire-fight” the complex comorbidities that arise from it. And this was in a population that “did not start off with a third of children being overweight and leaving their childhood with obesity,” she added. “The burden of our future generation is bound to be higher.”

Pryke said that there had been a push to include obesity in the quality and outcomes framework to encourage GPs to identify patients, discuss their weight with them, and signpost them to services; but the feedback that the college had received was that any attempt to include obesity in the framework would not be successful. Meanwhile, existing public health priorities were being slashed from primary care, she added, creating a real issue in terms of maintaining GP engagement in prevention and public health. “There is going to be a perception that it just isn’t our job,” Pryke said.

The seminar heard that Public Health England had provided some support for training and resources for GPs regarding obesity but that more was needed, including funding to develop tiered pathways for managing patients, as well as the simple ability to plot and track a child’s body mass index on the GP electronic record system—as this was not currently possible.

Sonia Saxena, clinical reader in primary care at the school of public health at Imperial College London, said that she would like to see feedback given to parents from the national childhood measurement programme and integrated with primary care.

Under the national childhood measurement programme children are currently weighed and measured at school, and their parents are informed by letter if their child is overweight. However, research by Imperial College found that 79% of parents who received feedback that their child was overweight did not recognise that their child had a weight problem, and 41% did not associate excess weight as a health concern. In terms of parental response, less than 15% talked to their GP to get advice on achieving a healthy weight for their child.¹

“National childhood measurement programme feedback is not integrated with primary care and I would like that to change; we could join that feedback up with that child’s GP,” Saxena said.

1 Saxena S, Lavery A. Confronting child obesity in primary care. *Br J Gen Pract* 2014;64:10-11. <http://bjgp.org/content/64/618/10.full>.

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