



Obesity: medical leaders call for end to “stigmatising” language

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The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) and more than 100 medical and scientific organisations around the world have called for an end to “unscientific, stigmatising language” around obesity.

In a consensus statement published in the journal *Nature Medicine* on 4 March to coincide with the first World Obesity Day, the organisations argued for strong policies and legislation to prevent weight based discrimination.¹

The RCP highlighted that, while an estimated 19 million people in the UK are obese, many feel too stigmatised or ashamed to discuss their weight with a doctor despite the associated risk of type 2 diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and poor mental health.

People with obesity are also less likely to attend screening visits for cervical smears or mammograms, and some doctors avoid talking to patients about weight for fear of offending them, it added. Last year the RCP urged the government to recognise obesity as a disease.

Commenting on the consensus statement, Rachel Batterham, RCP’s lead adviser on obesity, said, “People living with obesity are constantly shamed and blamed for their disease. This is

because many people, including doctors, policy makers, and others, fail to recognise that obesity is a chronic disease with far reaching consequences for both individuals and societies.

“They may believe that patients suffer from a simple lack of willpower, or have made a lifestyle choice, or refuse to ‘eat less and move more.’ But like all chronic diseases, the root causes of obesity run much deeper and can be genetic, psychological, sociocultural, economic, and environmental.”

She added, “We must start by providing doctors with the skills needed to discuss healthy weight routinely during every contact with patients to ensure that no more opportunities are missed to help people stay healthy.

“Anything we can do to support doctors and patients to talk openly about obesity is a step in the right direction. It could ultimately mean the difference between life and death.”

1 Rubino F, Puhl RM, Cummings DE, et al. Joint international consensus statement for ending stigma of obesity. *Nat Med* 2020. 10.1038/s41591-020-0803-x.

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