Promoting a positive office environment

From Medical Care for Obese Patients; NIDDK Weight Control Information Center

Using the following guidelines can improve patient care in your office. To create a positive office environment, review these guidelines with your medical and administrative staff.

1. **Create an accessible and comfortable office environment.**
   - Provide sturdy, armless chairs and high, firm sofas in waiting rooms.
   - Provide sturdy, wide examination tables that are bolted to the floor to prevent tipping.
   - Provide extra-large examination gowns.
   - Install a split lavatory seat and provide a specimen collector with a handle. Properly mounted grab bars are needed to enable a person to get up more easily. It is important to install floor mounted toilets and well-supported toilet bowls.

2. **Use medical equipment that can accurately assess patients who are obese.**
   - Use large adult blood pressure cuffs or thigh cuffs on patients with an upper-arm circumference greater than 34 cm.
   - Have extra-long phlebotomy needles, tourniquets, and large vaginal specula on hand.
   - Have a weight scale with adequate capacity (greater than 350 pounds) for obese patients.

3. **Reduce patient fears about weight.**
   - Weigh patients only when medically appropriate.
   - Weigh patients in a private area that allows for confidentiality.
   - Record weight without comments.
   - Ask patients if they wish to discuss their weight or health.
   - Avoid using the term obesity. Your patients may be more comfortable with terms such as "difficulties with weight" or "being overweight."

4. **Monitor obesity-related medical conditions and risk factors.**
   - Conduct tests to assess type 2 diabetes, dyslipidemia, hypertension, sleep apnea, ischemic heart disease, and nonalcoholic steatohepatitis.
   - Consider concerns of the extremely obese patient that may be overlooked such as lower extremity edema, thromboembolic disease, respiratory insufficiency (Pickwickian syndrome), skin compression (ulcers), and fungal infections.
5. **Offer preventive care services.**
   - Allow adequate time during office visits for preventive care services.
   - Recommend or provide preventive care services that are not impeded by the size of the patient, such as Pap smears, breast examinations, mammography, prostate examinations, and stool testing.

6. **Encourage healthy behaviors.**
   - Discuss weight loss—as little as 5 to 10 percent of body weight—as a treatment for weight-related medical conditions.
   - Emphasize healthy behaviors to prevent further weight gain, whether or not the patient is able or willing to lose weight.
   - Encourage physical activity to improve cardiovascular health.
   - Seek out professional resources to assist your patients and provide referrals to registered dietitians, certified diabetes educators, exercise physiologists, weight management programs, and support groups, as appropriate.
   - Promote self-acceptance and encourage patients to lead a full and active life.