

Obstacles in providing quality care to large patients

There can be legitimate challenges in providing quality care to obese patients, especially with certain medical imaging procedures. For example, CT and MRI scans can pose obstacles because of weight limitations with the imaging table or the size of the opening on the imager. Films can produce low-quality images because of the patient's size that are difficult to interpret¹. Prenatal ultrasounds can also be more difficult to perform in women of large size. These issues are concerning because incomplete examinations can lead to misdiagnosis, inability to assign a diagnosis, or other serious consequences for the patient such as increased hospitalization.

What can providers do?

- Be aware of the limitations of current imaging equipment at your medical facility
- Have knowledge of imaging protocols and equipment settings when examining large patients
- Ensure that ultrasound equipment is powerful enough to detect information needed
- Whenever possible, ensure that ultrasounds in large women are performed by a technician who specializes in prenatal ultrasound
- Be sensitive in your communication with large patients should you be uncertain of the accuracy of their imaging results or unable to perform a procedure because of their size. Avoid language that communicates blame to the patient. Instead, express your desire to provide appropriate care to the patient and identify alternative potential treatment options (e.g., can a different medical procedure be performed? If not, is there another location or facility where the patient can access appropriately-sized equipment for the procedure?)
- If alternative medical procedures cannot be performed because of the patient's size, provide a clear explanation for this to the patient while making sure to communicate empathy. It is likely that both the patient and provider will feel frustration. If weight loss counseling is provided, ensure that information is offered with sensitivity and that the patient is provided with appropriate resources.
- Talk to appropriate personnel about the need to invest in medical equipment to accommodate obese patients

¹ Uppot RN, Sahani DV, Hahn PF, Kalra MK, Saini SS, & Mueller PR. Effect of Obesity on Image Quality: Fifteen-year Longitudinal Study for Evaluation of Dictated Radiology Reports. *Radiology*. 2006; 240: 435-439.

