Having Obesity Conversations With Patients:

How Can I Talk With Patients About Obesity Management When I Am Facing Similar Challenges Myself?

A 3-5 Minute Conversation Can Help Change Behavior, But...[1]

- Few people with overweight or obesity—**about one third**—get weight management counseling from their healthcare professionals (HCPs)[1]
- HCPs with overweight or obesity provide counseling on weight management less often than HCPs without overweight or obesity[2]



Considering Challenges Faced by HCPs With Overweight or Obesity

Common Hesitation	What the Evidence Supports
"My patient may see me as a hypocrite."	Among patients with overweight or obesity, trust in their HCP is high regardless of the HCP's body weight.[3]
"Obesity feels too personal to address when I share it."	Shared experiences can foster empathy and practical guidance.[4]
"I'm not equipped to provide counseling on weight loss."	HCPs with overweight or obesity report lower confidence in counseling people with obesity than HCPs who have BMI in the normal range.[2]

Approaches to Overcome the Challenges

Approach	Supporting Evidence
Build confidence through obesity-specific training	HCPs with overweight or obesity who received high-quality obesity-related training are more likely to feel competent in counseling patients with obesity.[2]
Recognize and address your own internalized weight bias	Internalized weight bias is documented among HCPs with overweight or obesity. Like their patients, HCPs need to recognize that obesity is not a personal failing.[4,5] See the resource on avoiding bias for more information.
Lead the conversation with expertise and evidence	Patients trust their HCP's advice regardless of the HCP's weight.[3] Shared experience may make discussions on weight easier, through empathy and practical, experience-based guidance.[3,4]
Use respectful, unbiased, nonstigmatizing communication approaches	Some patients may feel judged when their HCP has overweight or obesity.[3] Respectful, unbiased, nonstigmatizing communication may alleviate these feelings. See the resource on language choices for more information.

The Bottom Line

Patients trust their primary care HCP regardless of body weight. Among HCPs with overweight or obesity, higher-quality obesity-related training is associated with greater confidence in diet and exercise counseling. Recognizing internalized weight bias can also support HCP well-being and patient care. Communication can lead to change, so HCPs need to find ways to talk with their patients about weight management.

References:

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2. Bleich. Obesity (Silver Spring). 2012;20:999.
3. Bleich. Prev Med. 2013;57:120.
4. Jeffers. Prim Health Care Rev Dev. 2024;25.e5.
5. Nadolsky. Endocr Pract. 2023;29:417.

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