

STOP Obesity Alliance – Strategies to Overcome and Prevent

Addressing obesity is complex. On the one hand, it requires a societal approach, including building supportive environments where the healthy choices become easier choices. With one of every three Americans affected by obesity and another one-third by overweight, few can argue the importance of broad strokes aimed at the environments in which we live.

On the other hand, addressing the individual also is necessary. While this, in part, refers to appropriate clinical treatments and compassionate guidance for those already affected by obesity, it also means educating the public, health care professionals and key decision makers about obesity, to support a strategic and productive approach to this public health epidemic.

Educating the public is important to build greater awareness and understanding of obesity and people affected by obesity. Though we've made strides in debunking myths that obesity is about appearance rather than health and that addressing obesity is all about "willpower," there's still much work to be done. Misunderstandings and vitriolic comments about obesity and those affected by obesity continue to swamp the Internet, newspapers, TV...and even academic journals.

The Obesity Society recently launched "Treat Obesity Seriously," an important initiative to combat the obesity epidemic by shifting the dialogue from blame to solution and to raise awareness about the need to treat obesity as we do other serious health conditions, like heart disease and cancer. I encourage you to learn more on the campaign's website [here](#).

Educating health professionals is vital also. When I was in medical school, we learned essentially nothing about obesity. A physician survey commissioned by STOP Obesity Alliance found that most primary care physicians reported that no one in their practice has been trained to deal with weight issues. This continues to be a challenge and I hear often from colleagues that they just don't have the resources they need to help patients manage obesity.

I'm excited to report that there are several groups working hard on this issue. The American Medical Association (AMA)'s recent vote to classify obesity as a disease will bring more physician focus to this issue and the Treat Obesity Seriously campaign has a large component geared toward health care professionals. Additionally, the American Board of Obesity Medicine recently held its first board certification examination and nearly 200 U.S. physicians passed (I'm proud to be one of them). This is an important step in the right direction that will increase the number of providers who are trained and certified to effectively address obesity.

We must continue to educate community leaders and policymakers on what obesity is, what it isn't, and what to do about it. Members of Congress are already exploring ways to address obesity. Last month, the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act was introduced in both the Senate and the House. If passed, the legislation would increase awareness of the Medicare counseling benefit among doctors and patients, expand beneficiary access to behavioral counseling services by allowing a range of health care providers to offer these services and provide coverage for obesity medications for appropriate patients.

As the dialogue about the AMA decision continues, I encourage everyone to learn more about efforts to increase obesity education, prevention and treatment. By encouraging innovation and continuing our research, I am confident more paths forward will emerge to effectively address this disease.