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Barriers to prevention and treatment of childhood obesity in health professionals

Barriers, skills and training needs among health professionals in the prevention and treatment of childhood obesity were evaluated using a validated national survey. Twenty-six thousand nine hundred thirty-four Florida health professionals, including physicians, nurses, dietitians and dentists were asked to complete the survey regarding attitudes, barriers, skills and training needs related to childhood obesity prevention and treatment. Surveys were sent via email and Survey-Monkey to all health professionals. The majority of survey respondents indicated that both childhood and adolescent overweight are conditions that need treatment (childhood: 81.4-91.9%; adolescent: 86.9-94.8%), affect future risk of chronic disease (90.7-97.5%) and affect future quality of life (91.7-97.3%). The barrier most frequently cited by health professionals as “most of time” or “often” was lack of patient involvement (84.6-91.4%). Areas most frequently cited as low proficiency were family conflicts/concerns (34.7-75.2%), use of behavioral management strategies (22.5-60.3%) and guidance in parenting technique (28.7-56.7%). Dentists had the highest percentage of low proficiency (lowest perceived proficiency) in all skills (38.3-75.2%, $p < 0.0083$) while dietitians reported highest proficiency in use of behavioral management strategies, modification of patient diet/eating practices, modification of patient sedentary behavior and assessment of the degree of overweight. Health professionals were concerned about childhood obesity prevention and treatment, however, proficiency in prevention and treatment was not improved since the original national survey was published 15 years ago. There is a continued need to examine the current healthcare system to improve health professionals’ proficiency in the design and delivery of childhood obesity prevention and treatment.

Biography

Catherine Christie is Associate Dean and Professor in the Brooks College of Health, University of North Florida. She is co-author of four books including The Latino Food Lover's Glossary; Fat is Not Your Fate, Eat to Stay Young and I'd Kill for a Cookie and serves as Editor of the Manual of Medical Nutrition Therapy. She earned her Masters' and PhD from Florida State University and has authored 24 peer reviewed journal articles. Her research focuses on overweight and obesity prevention and treatment, nutrition in chronic disease prevention and treatment and inter-professional collaboration in education and health care.

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