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Briefing Series on the Role of Psychology in Health Care **Adult Obesity**

- More than one third (36%) of the U.S. adult population is obese, with African American women having the highest rates.¹ Evidence suggests the association between lower socioeconomic status and greater risk of obesity is more consistent among women than men.²
- The total costs attributable to obesity-related disease approach \$147 billion annually in the U.S.³
- Obese individuals may suffer from social and emotional problems, including stigmatization, discrimination, low self-esteem, and poor quality of life.⁴ They are also more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and eating disorders (particularly binge eating) and are more likely to have a history of physical or sexual trauma.⁵⁻⁷

| How Psychologists Can Help

- Psychologists play an integral role in the treatment of obesity by providing effective interventions that include self-monitoring of eating habits and physical activity, stress management, stimulus control, contingency management, cognitive restructuring, and social support.⁴
- Psychologists can also assist primary care physicians in tracking patient behaviors related to diet, physical activity, and weight; providing more consistent guidance for patients; improving time efficiency during visits; and promoting integrated care.⁸⁻⁹ Fewer than half of primary care physicians reported providing specific guidance on diet, physical activity, or weight control, and fewer than 22% reported routinely and systematically monitoring patients' behaviors or other measures of progress related to diet, physical activity, or weight.⁹
- Weight-loss surgery is an additional option for weight reduction in a limited number of patients meeting criteria for clinically severe obesity (i.e., body mass index >40 or >35 kg/m² with comorbid conditions).
 - » Psychological evaluations to determine emotional stability/readiness for surgery are not only critical for patient safety and success but are also now required by insurance companies.¹⁰
 - » Psychoeducational groups and support groups, as well as individual counseling, have been used as effective supplemental treatment approaches for weight-loss surgery.⁴
- Many studies have supported the effectiveness of behavioral therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness, and motivational interviewing interventions for weight loss in obese patients.^{4, 11, 12}

- Psychologists have the knowledge and training to assist with the prevention of weight problems, adherence to weight-loss programs, and maintenance of healthy weight and lifestyle, which are greatly needed to address the current obesity epidemic. The American Psychological Association is currently developing clinical practice guidelines for the treatment of obesity based on systematic reviews of the scientific literature.

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