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Georgia Southern shows dangerous disconnect between doctors and parents of overweight children

June 24, 2016



Pediatric obesity prevalence remains at historically high levels. The objective of this study was to examine secular trends in the percentages of overweight/obese children who received notification from a health-care professional (HCP) about their unhealthy weight.

Researchers analyzed data of 25,570 (including 8639 overweight/obese) children aged 2–18 years collected from seven cross-sectional biennial surveys (National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1999–2014), in which adolescents (16 years and older) and caregivers, mostly biological mothers, of children (2–15 years) were asked ‘Has a doctor or other health professional ever told

you that you (or your child) were overweight?’

Approximately 90% of overweight/obese children visited HCPs at least once in the past 12 months, but only 22.12% (s.e.=1.92) in 1999 to 34.43% (2.35) in 2014 of the overweight/obese children were notified by HCPs about unhealthy weight. The biennial increase in odds of receipt of notification of unhealthy weight was 1.08 (95% confidence interval=(1.04–1.12)). Greater likelihood for receipt of notification was associated with being obese (odds ratio=5.03 (4.29–5.89) vs overweight); black (1.24 (1.06–1.46)) or Hispanic race/ethnicity (1.72 (1.45–2.04) vs white); female sex (1.22 (1.07–1.11) vs boys); and child’s insurance status (1.31 (1.08–1.59) vs uninsured). There were increasing odds of being notified with increasing age: 1.00 (reference), 2.24 (2.06–2.62), 3.22 (2.50–4.13) and 4.87 (3.76–6.32) for children 2–5, 6–11, 12–16 and 16+ year old, respectively. The frequency of medical contact was linearly associated with an increased likelihood of being notified.

Notification of child’s unhealthy weight by HCPs increased significantly between 1999 and 2014, but the opportunity of clinical intervention remained substantially under-utilized.

“[An increasing trend in health-care professionals notifying children of unhealthy weight status: NHANES 1999–2014](#), was published in International Journal of Obesity.

Dr. Andrew Hansen, Assistant Professor of Community Health Behavior and Education at the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health Georgia Southern University and Dr. Jian Zhang, Associate Professor of Epidemiology at JPHCOPH lead the research team. Ms. Ashley Hill and Ms. Suzi Turner, JPHCOPH alumni, were co-authors.

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