

Practice Patterns for the Management of Patients who are Obese: Bariatricians (BARIs) and Primary Care Physicians (PCPs), Cardiologists (CARDs), Endocrinologists (ENDOs) Who Do Not Practice Bariatric Medicine

Terry Ann Glauser MD MPH, Nancy Roepke MBA, Ben Whitfield MA, Boris Stevenin MD, Anne Marie Dubois MsPharm, Soo Mi Ahn PharmD

Background

Obesity, defined as the presence of an excessively high level of body fat in relation to lean tissue and recognized by the American Medical Association (AMA) as a disease, is the second leading cause of preventable death in the United States and a leading cause of morbidity, disability, healthcare utilization, and healthcare costs. Despite this, physicians' rates of screening for and management of obesity are low. The 2009-2010 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found that more than 35% of US adults were obese. A study was conducted to identify the primary educational needs, attitudes and barriers of US primary care physicians (PCP), endocrinologists (ENDO), cardiologists (CARD) and bariatricians (BARI) in managing obesity.

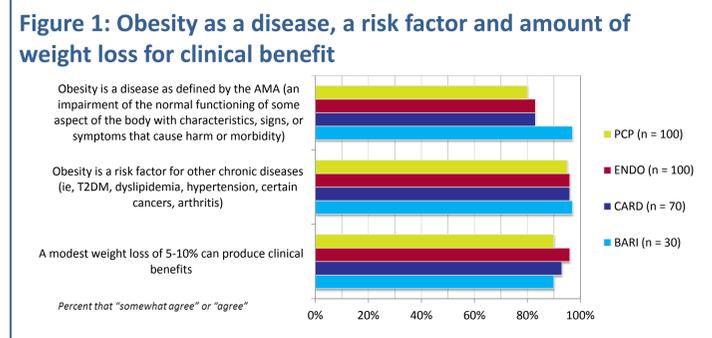
Methods

A survey was developed to elicit information from US-based PCPs, ENDOs, CARDs, and BARIs regarding their management decisions for patients with obesity. The survey included questions regarding perception of obesity, familiarity with managing obesity, and management recommendation questions for varying patient presentations in case vignettes. The survey items used a 10-point Likert scale (1 = least, 10 = most) to assess perceptions of management of patients with obesity. Prior to distribution, the surveys were pilot tested with practicing healthcare providers to ensure clarity of content. The surveys were distributed electronically to 1,640 US-based physicians in February 2013; 300 responses were collected and analyzed. Data were collected and analyzed with PASW Statistics 18 (SPSS; Chicago, Illinois).

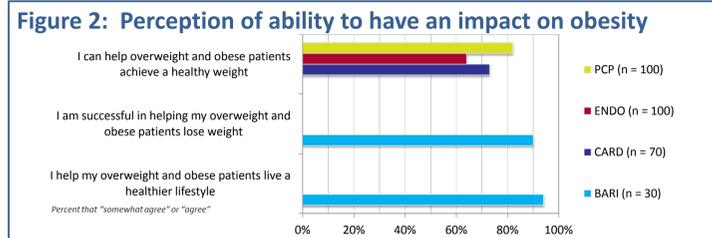
Results

Demographic Characteristics		PCP N = 100	ENDO N = 100	CARD N = 70	BARI N = 30
Years since medical school graduation		26	24	27	29
Trained in US		71%	63%	73%	80%
Specialty					
	Family practice	56%	-	-	-
	Internal medicine	44%	-	-	-
	Endocrinology	-	100%	-	-
	Cardiology	-	-	100%	-
	Bariatrics	-	-	-	70%
	Bariatric surgery	-	-	-	30%
Patients seen per week (mean)		116	109	106	88
% of patients seen who are obese (mean)		33%	46%	33%	75%
% of patients who are overweight (as opposed to obese (mean)		34%	36%	37%	36%
Present employment*					
	Solo	28%	28%	9%	37%
	Group	65%	58%	71%	43%
Major professional activity	Direct patient care	100%	95%	99%	90%

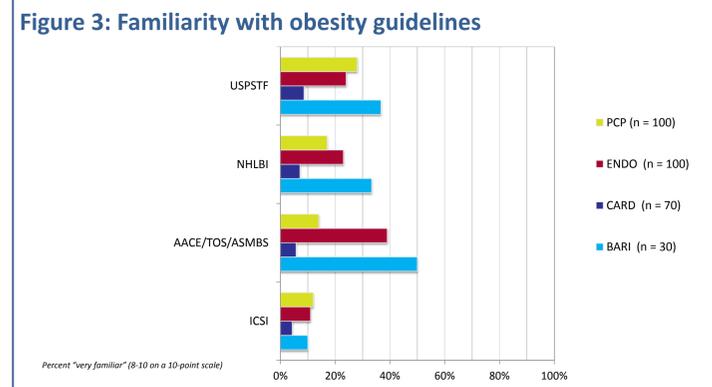
Results of Case-Based Survey



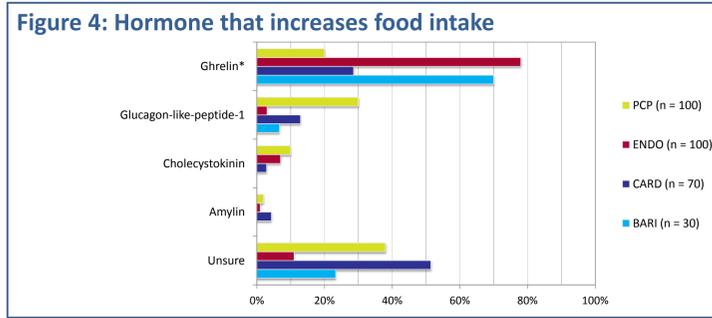
•20% of PCPs, ENDOs and CARDs did not view obesity as a disease.



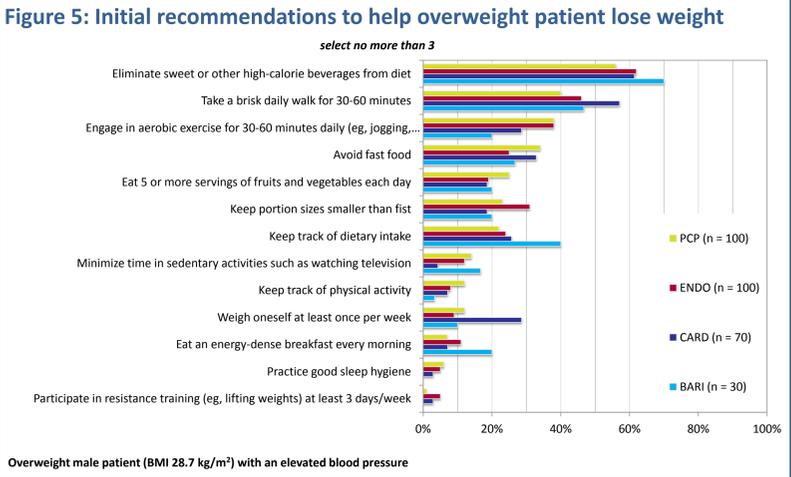
•18% of PCPs, 36% ENDOs, and 27% CARDs did not think they could help obese patients achieve a healthy weight.



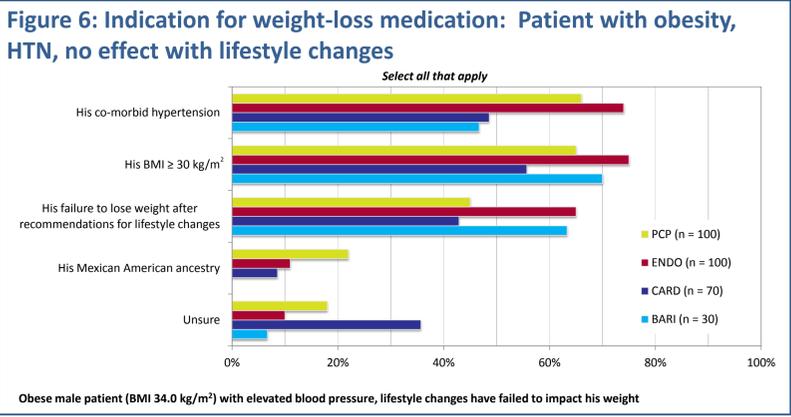
•Familiarity with any guidelines by any specialty was low, but higher with BARIs.



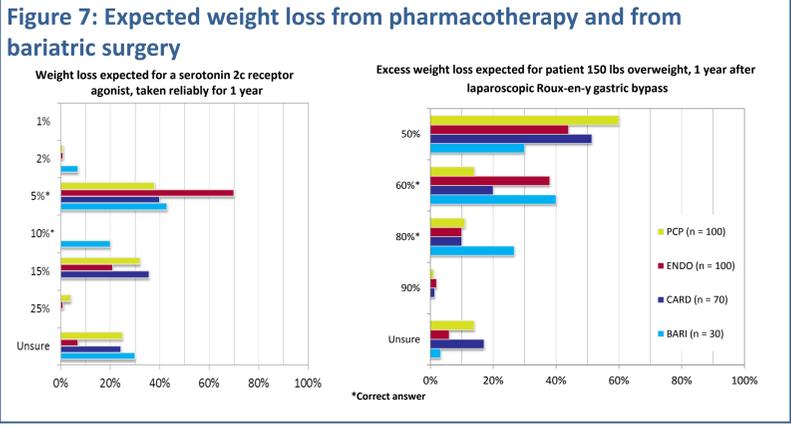
•A small percentage of ENDOs and BARIs and most PCPs and CARDs could not identify a hormone that increases food intake.



•Most suggested eliminating high calorie beverages and engaging in aerobic exercise



•No consensus on reasons to start pharmacotherapy for obesity



•Most PCPs, CARDs, BARIs and many ENDOs expected more weight loss from pharmacotherapy than has been observed in clinical trials or were unsure. Most PCPs, CARDs, ENDOs and many BARIs expected less excess weight loss from bariatric surgery than was observed in clinical trials or were unsure

Conclusions

There are important areas of unmet educational needs for primary care physicians and for specialists in the obesity field:

- Recognition of obesity as a disease as defined by AMA and the evidence supporting that definition
- Knowledge of current evidence-based guidelines for screening for obesity and management of obesity
- Education that promotes an understanding of the hormonal basis of appetite regulation and the pathophysiology of obesity
- Awareness of recommended lifestyle changes to use when counseling overweight and obese patients
- Clarification of the current clinical guidelines and indications to initiate weight-loss pharmacotherapy
- Information about FDA-approved weight-loss medications, including efficacy and safety data
- Evidence about expected weight loss from weight loss medications and from bariatric surgery

This study demonstrates the need for ongoing education for physicians who do not practice bariatric medicine and for BARIs, who manage patients with obesity on a daily basis.

Discussion

With one third of the US population being overweight and one third obese, obesity is a major public health issue. It is crucial for physicians to be able to appropriately counsel and manage patients with obesity. To do this effectively, physicians must have an understanding of the pathophysiology of the disease of obesity and management strategies. To deliver appropriate care, physicians also need to be educated as to the appropriate expectations regarding the outcomes of pharmacologic and surgical interventions. Physicians also need to be confident that their efforts to help patients achieve a normal weight will be effective.

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Nancy Roepke
 Director of Research and Strategic Development
 CE Outcomes, LLC
 107 Frankfurt Circle
 Birmingham, AL 35211
 Ph:205.259.1514 Fx: 205.259.1501