

A Virtual Issue on Obesity

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Introducing a Virtual Issue on Obesity

We are pleased to provide a virtual issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners* devoted to the subject of obesity. As a result of the National Institutes of Health and the United States Public Health Services efforts to standardize the criteria for diagnosing and treating obesity in adults and children (National Institutes of Health, 1998; U. S. Public Health Service, 2000; and U. S. Public Health Service, 2001), obesity became a widely recognized health concern in both the popular press and professional literature at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century. Publications in the *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (JAANP)* focusing on obesity reflected this national trend. Between January 2000 and January 2009, forty-six articles about obesity were published in the *JAANP*, offering a wide range of perspectives on this modern day affliction. The importance of obesity in clinical practice and nursing education have not abated, and we have compiled fifteen of these articles in a virtual compendium to facilitate access by readers with an interest in the problem of obesity. The collection of articles highlights milestones in nursing's obesity scholarship over the past ten years and serves as a guide to the next decade of work needed to improve the care of obese patients.

The articles included in the virtual issue frame the mounting concerns and paradoxes about obesity as a general public health problem in the United States and as a common, often intractable, individual patient problem in the practice arena. They are arranged in three general categories: theory and principles of weight control, pathophysiology of obesity and its comorbidities, and original research. The foci of the articles also provide insight into the priorities within the obesity epidemic of greatest interest to advance practice nurses: obesity in children and adolescents, obesity and heart disease, and obesity and type 2 diabetes. The authors introduced bioelectrical impedance analysis as an assessment technique for accurately measuring adiposity (Ricciardi & Talbot, 2007 and Ricciardi, 2007), laid the foundation for the adoption of new nomenclature and criteria for identifying pediatric overweight and obesity (Waldrop & Ferguson, 2007), and synthesized clinical guidelines for weight management (Shay, 2009; Hagarty, Schmidt, Bernaix, & Clement, 2004; and Doolen & Miller, 2005). The transtheoretical model of behavioral change often undergirds scholarship about chronic illnesses, and the model was incorporated in two of the articles about managing obesity in clinical practice. Seals (2007) presented the transtheoretical model as an organizing framework to assist nurse practitioners to apply stage-specific interventions to the management of overweight and obese adults, while Turner, Thomas, Wagner, and Moseley (2008) evaluated the effectiveness of a

weight loss program incorporating diet, exercise and patient education based on the transtheoretical model of behavior change.

Researchers reported original studies to investigate a wide range of obesity topics. Drury and Louis (2002) were early investigators of the role weight bias plays in creating health care disparities among obese patients, as obese women delay and avoid health visits in an effort to avoid stigmatizing situations. Two studies reproduced here target the increasing prevalence of obesity in children and adolescents, and the associated increased risk of type 2 diabetes and the metabolic syndrome in American youths (Harden, Cowan, Velasquez-Mieyer, & Patton, 2007; and Appel, Harrell, & Davenport, 2005). Other authors provided bookends to the “obesity paradox,” the incongruous situation in which obesity is a major underlying risk factor in the development of cardiovascular disease and heart failure, while at the same time heart failure survival is highest among those stable outpatients who are the most obese. Hall, et al. (2005) tested the obesity paradox among hospitalized patients, while Shelby, Davis, and Carlson (2008) offered a pathophysiological perspective for understanding the apparent paradox.

An undercurrent within the literature, is an uneasy recognition that contemporary treatment standards involving diet, exercise, and behavior modification are inadequate for achieving and sustaining weight loss among obese people (Harden, et al., 2007; Turner, et al., 2008). Perhaps most telling about the ineffectiveness of the prevailing treatment modalities is the study by Miller, Alpert, and Cross (2008). These researchers found a majority of the nurses they surveyed were overweight or obese, a majority of the overweight or obese nurses reported lacking the motivation to make lifestyle changes necessary for weight reduction, and almost half reported being unable to lose weight despite healthy diet and exercise habits. Within this context, the article by Bellar, Jarosz, and Bellar (2008) stands as a signpost for future practice and research. Their discussion of the biological regulation of energy homeostasis and weight regulation helps to explain why clinical practice is fraught with patients experiencing weight loss recidivism, and offers a framework for investigating alternative strategies to improve the health of obese patients, with or without weight loss. The article forms the basis for a continuing education activity included in this virtual edition of the *Journal*.

The editors of the *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners* are proud to bring a collection of distinguished obesity articles to you in this convenient format. We hope you enjoy it and find it useful in your pursuit of excellence in your clinical practice and research.

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