

Overweight and Obesity: Knowledge, Attitudes and Recognition by Patients and Medical Practitioners

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The World Health Organization describes obesity as the most visible but neglected public health problem. We assessed the knowledge, perception and attitudes towards obesity among overweight/obese patients and the recognition and management of overweight/obesity by medical practitioners. This descriptive cross-sectional study interviewed 317 overweight/ obese patients during their first visits to medical clinics at the University Hospital, KDU. Overweight (23–27.4 kg/m²) and obesity (>27.5 kg/m²) were defined as per the WHO body mass index (BMI) cut-off values for Asians. A four-part questionnaire assessed demographic characteristics, comorbidities, knowledge, perception and attitudes towards overweight/obesity. Recognition and management of overweight/obesity by medical practitioners were evaluated through recall of previous consultations and review of medical records. Among the study participants, 163(51.4%) were obese and 154(48.6%) were overweight. Sixty-three participants (19.9%) knew BMI is a weight measurement according to height. Only 11 (3.5%) knew the ideal BMI for an adult Sri-Lankan. Less than half (n=144, 45.4%) considered overweight/obesity a medical problem. In 92(59.7%) overweight and 150(92.0%) obese participants, body weight misperception was observed. Of the 267 participants who reported being evaluated by another medical practitioner in the previous six months, 102(38.2%) had been informed of the diagnosis of overweight/obesity by the doctor. Still, the diagnosis was documented only in seven (2.6%) patients. Nonetheless, 110(41.2%) patients had received weight reduction advice during previous consultations and 68(61.8%) had followed the instructions. Poor knowledge and misperception of body weight among the studied population are concerning. Recognition of overweight and obesity by physicians was deficient, and efforts at interventions were inadequate.

Keywords: *obesity, overweight, body mass index, knowledge, recognition*