The Weight of Wellness

Provider Handout – Quick Tips

Understanding Weight Stigma

Weight stigma refers to negative attitudes, stereotypes, and discrimination aimed at individuals because of their body weight. Patients with overweight or obesity may experience this stigma from peers, family, and even health care professionals. Recognizing the impact of stigma helps providers communicate more effectively and compassionately.

Effects of Weight Stigma on Patients

- Lower self-esteem
- Increased depression, anxiety, stress, and social isolation
- Higher risk of eating disorders and substance use
- Avoidance of physical activity and unhealthy eating behaviors
- Avoiding, delaying, or stopping medical care

Creating a Welcoming Environment

Ensure clinical spaces include:

- Scales that accommodate higher weights and provide privacy
- Sturdy exam tables and seating such as armless chairs and sofas
- Gowns and blood pressure cuffs in multiple sizes

Communicating About Weight – Avoid Judgmental Terms

Use phrases like:

- "Weight" instead of "fat" or "obese"
- "Reaching a healthier weight range" instead of "ideal weight"
- "Lowering weight" instead of "improving weight"

Use Person-First Language

Examples:

- "People who have excess weight"
- "People who have obesity"

Special Considerations for Black Female Adolescents

- Black girls often experience higher rates of weight-related stigma and bias in medical, school, and community settings.
- Cultural beauty norms may differ; avoid assumptions about body image or motivation for weight change.

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- Recognize historical medical mistrust—use transparency, shared decision-making, and validation of lived experiences.
- Address social drivers of health such as access to safe recreation spaces, food environments, and chronic stress related to discrimination.
- Prioritize strength-based language highlighting resilience, cultural identity, and whole-person wellness.