

# Overweight physicians are also vulnerable to weight bias

March 20 2013, by Megan Orciari

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(Medical Xpress)—Overweight patients are not the only ones who suffer weight stigmatization in the doctor's office, a Yale study finds. Physicians who are overweight or obese are vulnerable to biased attitudes from patients which could interfere with quality of care, according to a study by the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity. The findings, published in the *International Journal of Obesity*, show that a provider's excess weight negatively affects patients' perceptions of his or her credibility, level of trust, and inclination to follow medical advice.

Previous research in the journal *Obesity* has documented negative stigma by health providers toward overweight and obese patients, but this is the first study to examine whether physicians themselves are vulnerable to the same weight bias from patients.

Researchers conducted an online survey with 358 adults. Each participant was randomly assigned to complete one of three surveys, in which they were asked about their perceptions of physicians who were described as either normal-weight, overweight or obese. Researchers also assessed participants' [attitudes](#) towards obese individuals in general.

Participants reported more mistrust of physicians who are overweight or obese, stated they would be less inclined to follow their medical advice, and would more likely change providers if their physician appeared overweight or obese—whereas normal-weight [physicians](#) elicited more favorable opinions from respondents. These biases toward doctors

remained consistent regardless of participants' own body weight, and were more pronounced among individuals who demonstrated stronger weight bias toward obese persons in general.

A provider's body weight may lead to biased perceptions by patients that could impair the quality of patient-provider interactions and potentially even impact patient compliance with their provider's health advice, assert the authors.

"The provider-patient relationship is a critical part of health care delivery", says Rebecca Puhl, director of research at the Rudd Center. "Efforts are needed to educate both patients and providers about weight bias, and how this affects provider-patient interactions and the extent to which patients follow advice and feel comfortable discussing their own health concerns."

Provided by Yale University

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