Letter to the Editor: Teaching Medical Students to Help Patients Manage Their Weight: Outcomes of an Eight-School Randomized Controlled Trial

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We read with interest the article titled “Teaching Medical Students to Help Patients Manage Their Weight: Outcomes of an Eight-School Randomized Controlled Trial” by Ockene et al.¹ As a group of graduate, third-year medical students at Warwick Medical School (WMS) in the UK, we are invested in research aimed towards improving medical education, especially in areas of the curriculum which are increasingly seen in clinical practice, such as obesity. We would like to provide you with an insight into teaching at WMS and how this has shaped our personal objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) performance and confidence as future doctors.

At WMS, we are taught via multi-modal education (MME) which includes a combination of lectures, workshops, online courses, and roleplays, based upon the “5 A’s” (Ask, Advise, Assess, Assist, Arrange). Lectures are based around prevalence of obesity, nutrition, and behavioural change, whilst workshops and roleplays allow us to put theory into practice.

We have been examined in OSCE stations specifically assessing the “5A’s” in weight management counselling (WMC), and have gained mean scores of over 80% across the cohort. In addition, we feel confidently prepared to hold consultations with patients regarding their weight. Discussions regarding obesity can be intimidating for medical students due to the potentially uncomfortable nature of the consultation. We believe being taught in a MME format helps to improve confidence by providing multiple learning resources regarding obesity intervention, and the space to practice these skills. We were pleased to see the similar results reported by Ockene et al.,¹ with MME students outperforming their peers.

In response to the findings regarding students “lacking information on the specifics of nutrition”, at WMS, we practice calculating body mass index, setting the patient a tailored

daily calorie goal, providing information on calorie content of common foods, and suggestion of low-calorie substitutes. In addition, WMS have recruited a student “social prescribing champion” who works alongside medical educators to improve WMC teaching, and promotes a healthy diet both on and off campus.

This article was well received as it provided evidence that the MME approach produces confident and high-performing medical students, equipped to provide WMC to patients. We welcome any medical school to adopt a MME approach to obesity management. We recommend medical schools recruit a “social prescribing champion” to work with educators to ensure students have sufficient background knowledge to provide WMC.

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Declarations:

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they do not have a conflict of interest.

REFERENCE

1. Ockene J, Pbert L, Crawford S et al. Teaching Medical Students to Help Patients Manage Their Weight: Outcomes of an Eight-School Randomized Controlled Trial. *J Gen Intern Med*. 2021. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-020-06571-x>

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