

The meeting with the obese person

Challenges. The population in the world will be thicker, and as a result we see more and more obese patients in health care. It makes new demands upon the nursing staff and postage.

By Lene Plambech, O.T., MPM and Gitte Bøgedal, P.T., MLP

Each 1per 9 Dane is obese, and number has increased by at least 100,000 in the last 10-20 years. Developments fed back into the hospitals, where figures from 2007 show that approximately four to five percent of patients are obese.

So the task is there both in municipalities and hospitals. But staff, training to perform the task, is first now being taken care of.

In connection with the writing of a book the obese - those with a Body Mass Index (BMI) that is larger or equal to 30 - we have made an interview among overweight persons and careers. An employee at a nursing home describes the situation thus: "I think that we have a lack of knowledge about overweight. We need more courses. We who work in the area need courses. We must have equipment. We do not know what to do." And she continues. "Resources are a major problem. It takes more time with the obese persons, because you have to be at least two helpers. It is not taken into planning. You just have to do it."

It is not easy to be the staff, that is caring for the obese. Staff has their own views on the patient, and these attitudes can come to dominate the meeting. Lessons from U.S. shows that in all groups of employees in health care are prejudices. Among other in a study among careers that 24 percent of the staff believed that the obese people have failed, and 22 percent felt that they are lazy. Almost half of the nurse's discomfort felt by should care for overweight.

That we here have prejudices, showing these comments from staff who are in contact with obese: "It is their own problem, they cannot just take together and eat less," and " may it really be true that we must adapt our society according to some people choose to be so big?" These are some of the opinions we have heard.

In our study the staff also expressed frustration, because it is not possible for them to provide the help they considered was necessary. They say among other things: "It was very humiliating for both patient and for me." And " I'm not sure of how my best to speak with the patient that the weight is a problem." It is not easy to be the person to receive help. When you are obese, it is visible. It cannot be hidden." An obese person says: "I have my own fears scenarios, if I become much larger, than I am now. About the chair can keep if the bed can keep. What they will put me in, if I come in and I am mega. Becoming hospitalized and let fall out stomachs and breasts is ... I know that age has something to do with it, but overweight makes it is not

beautiful. I will be difficult for me, if I should suddenly be in a bed and be cared for and looked after. It is a horror scenario.”

To meet these needs requires that the organization - the municipality or hospital - has a policy of meeting with and management of the obese. This will ensure, that the services offered, is clear for both the obese patient and the staff. There must also be clear guidelines on how to obtain resources. Personnel should be trained to cope with moving and handling, so they are in a proper manner, and staff must have knowledge about obesity. This task will then be solved professionally, and the employee will be meeting the obese without being nervous about how the task can be solved. You may as staff contribute to meeting with the overweight will be dignified and safely both for you and for the citizen / patient.

When the obese persons are asked how they want communication with staff to be, the wishes are modest. They want to be well received, so they will feel comfortable. They have the hopes to been seen as people they are, and not just their obesity to be seen, which often are in focus of the first contact. They want to be greeted with respect and a staff that is ready to the task to be performed.

Transfer and care tasks can be difficult to solve. Before you start the task, should you in your preparation consider the following:

- What is the patient to available resources and what should is the needed help?
- How many and which staff should to be present?
- What equipment is needed?
- Is there a need for special equipment? Check the weight limits.
- How should the task be solved?

Finally some good advice:

- Be prepared and be honest. The obese person is well aware of his weight and the problems it may cause.
- Inform the patient on what you are going to do. Obese persons are often afraid to fall or that the equipment not can hold.
- Be aware of your body language?

July 2009, Denmark