PROJECT INFORMATION

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Do People with Obesity Lose Weight When Offered a Choice of Research-Based Weight-Loss Treatment by Their Doctors?

Principal investigator

Daniel Bessesen, MD

Organization

Denver Health and Hospital Authority

What was the research about?

Obesity can lead to serious health problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. Doctors offering different treatment choices may help patients with obesity lose weight.

In this study, the research team wanted to see if giving patients a choice of one or more weight-loss treatments helped them lose weight. The team offered five options:

- Meal replacements
- Weight-loss medicines
- Weight Watchers® vouchers
- Recreation center passes
- Group lifestyle classes

Patients could choose one option at the start of the study and change or add options after six months. The research team compared the results for patients who used a weight-loss treatment to those who did not.

What were the results?

Over the course of the study, more patients who used a weight-loss treatment lost weight than patients who didn't use a treatment. A total of 35 percent of patients who used a weight-loss treatment lost at least 5 percent of their weight. Only 16 percent of the patients getting usual care lost that much.

Patients who used a weight-loss treatment were more likely to lose at least 5 percent of their weight if they

- Went to more of their monthly doctor visits
- Added a second weight-loss treatment
- Chose to take a weight-loss medicine

Of the patients selecting a treatment

- 35 percent chose meal replacements
- 28 percent chose weight-loss medicines
- 22 percent chose recreation center passes
- 7 percent chose Weight Watchers® vouchers
- 5 percent chose group lifestyle classes
- 2 percent wanted only monthly clinic visits

During the study, 55 percent of patients who selected a treatment changed that treatment at least once. As the study went on, more patients changed to medicines. More patients switched from meal replacements or recreation center passes than the other choices.

Who was in the study?

The study included 3,049 patients with obesity and at least one related health problem. Patients attended

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any of eight clinics serving patients with low incomes in the Denver, Colorado, area. Of the patients offered the choice of a treatment, 82 percent were white, 17 percent were black, and 1 percent were Native Indian or Alaskan. A total of 55 percent of patients identified as Hispanic or Latino. The average age was 50 and 70 percent were women.

What did the research team do?

Using health records, the research team created a list of patients with obesity from the eight healthcare clinics. The team assigned patients to one of two groups by chance. Patients in one group chose from a set of weight-loss treatments that the team had already found to work well. Of these 309 patients, 119 chose at least one treatment. During the one-year study, these patients visited a clinic and got weighed once a month. Patients choosing a treatment had to pay a \$5 or \$10 copay each month.

Patients in the second group received usual care and visited their doctors at least once during the study. The doctors gave patients information about a weight-loss treatment only if they asked for it. Of these patients, 12 percent asked their doctor for information

about a weight-loss treatment, and the doctors provided it.

The research team collected weight information from patients' health records. In addition, the team looked at health records to see what weight-loss program choices patients in the treatment group made.

What were the limits of the study?

The study included patients from only one healthcare system. The results may be different for patients in other places.

Future studies could look at whether patients' health conditions improve because of their weight-loss choices.

How can people use the results?

Doctors can use the results when considering similar ways to help patients lose weight. Health insurance companies could include these weight-loss-treatment choices in their plans.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Bessesen131.