How fat do I have to be to get help?
Lasting weight loss is not simply a matter of diet and exercise.

Objectives
To determine how patients with severe obesity (PSO) experience local health care services for weight reduction. To find out what challenges they face when they want to lose weight, and whether their need for coordinated support are met.

Keywords: Severe obesity, weight loss, follow-up.

Design and Method
21 PSO where recruited for 3 focus groups. 2 of the groups recruited through primary care physicians, and 1 from an inpatient PSO rehabilitation program. The focus groups were recorded and analysed using elements of grounded theory.

Results
All the respondents reported a need for psychological support relating to their obesity, as well as information and practical support for eating patterns, nutrition and exercise. Regaining weight is a strategy to achieve qualified help for their underlying psychological problems.

Citations

Obesity knowledge amongst health care professionals:
"Those who tried to “help” me told me to stop eating and start exercising. I was thinking: Yeah right, as if I don’t know that. They need to learn more about obesity. It’s more than just the fat. We KNOW we have to eat less, we KNOW we have to exercise more!"

Turning knowledge into action:
"...I’m a chef so I know very well what I should be doing. Trouble is, I know how good food can taste, and it gets hard after I’ve been dieting for 6 months. I love food and everything about it (…) and when I’m planning that healthy meal, I yearn for potatoes dauphinoise and a steak, instead of a dry chicken breast and veggies."

Establishing a contract with the patient:
"I suffer from anxiety and I need predictability, so if I’m to start on something, it can’t just stop suddenly. During bad periods it’s hard to get back on track, so if I miss 3-4 lessons it would make it easier if someone were to call me, asking me to come back."

Ongoing and coordinated support:
"I’ve been on sick leave for a while due to my lifestyle, and found my GP really helped me. (…) We worked as a sort of team for about 6 months. (…) Yeah, I would have made it if he hadn’t let me go at that point. I can’t do this by myself, at least not until I’ve had help over a longer period to establish new habits."

Conclusions
- PSO need a long term plan, commitment and support from a team of health professionals to lose weight.
- The coordinating team needs expertise in psychology, nutrition and exercise.

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Contact: cwhi@rorosrehab.no

Christina Hilmarsen, Jørgen Tronsmed and Line Oldervoll
LHL Health, Røros Rehabilitation, Norway