

Creating a Respectful Environment for all Clients

Just about everyone has experienced some anxiety with a clinical appointment. For those who are overweight or obese, these feelings can be magnified. There is often a sense of shame and failure associated with being overweight, and for many people, weight creates a barrier to accessing or receiving adequate health care. Providers are extremely important in breaking down those barriers and making clients feel secure in the clinic environment. The first step is to create an environment that is friendly for all clients, regardless of size or ability, increases comfort, reduces anxiety, and increases the chance of follow-up care.

Adapting the Office Environment for Overweight and Obese Clients*

- ❖ Waiting rooms should have several sturdy armless chairs.
- ❖ Sofas in the waiting area or in consultation rooms should be firm and high enough to ensure clients can easily rise.
- ❖ Posters, printed materials, and magazines should depict a variety of body shapes.
- ❖ The weight of clients should be done in a private area.
- ❖ Weight should be recorded silently without comments (positive or negative).
- ❖ Have clients who are resistant to being weighed stand on the scale backwards, so they do not have to look at the results.
- ❖ Extra large examining gowns should be available to accommodate clients, or you can let women to leave their top clothing on, unhooking their bra for a breast exam, when indicated.
- ❖ Examining tables should be wide and bolted to the floor or wall so that the table does not tip forward.
- ❖ A sturdy stool assists large patients in getting on the examination table.
- ❖ Several sizes of blood pressure cuffs should be available. Using too small a cuff can result in false readings.
- ❖ Longer needles and tourniquets should be available.

*Adapted from the Centers for Obesity Research and Education