

“Are we losing the war against obesity in the us?”

Opinion

With over 100million Americans affected by obesity, it is easy to wonder whether medical science is winning or losing the war against this disease in the US. It was not until 2013 that the American Medical Association was the first to officially recognize obesity as a disease entity. To this day, some third party payers and insurance companies still refuse to reimburse treatments relating to obesity even after the Affordable Care Act has mandated that obesity treatments be paid for within 5 years. These make many health care providers wonder whether obesity is taken seriously by the health insurance industry in the US. Our public and private elementary schools continue to offer our children “snack attacks” for purchase, which include sugary juices, cookies and candy instead of milk, fresh fruit and low carb options.

In the past several years, the US Food and Drug Administration approved 4 new obesity medications, yet very few insurers are willing to pay for these much needed medications and patients are left with few affordable weight loss options. Some patients on Medicaid have no other option than to undergo weight loss surgery because this surgery is covered by Medicaid for those who qualify. While the desire of our legislators to tackle the national epidemic of obesity is commendable, in practical terms, very little has been done to help obese Americans get coverage for obesity treatments. It is equally clear to any health care professional in the field of obesity medicine that we need more treatment options for patients suffering from obesity. There is a so called “treatment gap” for those with BMIs from 27-35 who have too few treatment options. Many are led to wonder if we wait too long before treating obesity. Should obesity awareness and treatment start at a much younger age and lower BMI, say 26 or 27? Some providers would fear being criticized or accused of providing weight loss for cosmetic reasons rather than prevention of co-morbidities

due to progressive weight gain. Meanwhile, as we wait for solutions from our elected officials, the number of obese Americans is steadily increasing with estimates that 75% of the US population will have pre-diabetes or type 2 diabetes by 2025. I encourage all young medical students, researchers, dieticians, nutritionists and allied health care professionals with an interest in obesity to “think outside of the box” and develop new and improved strategies for combating this epidemic which is consuming our society.

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