



Developing A Multi- Stakeholder Approach to Address Obesity as a Disease:

A Guidebook for Creating an Obesity Forum

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Creating an Obesity Forum: A Guide Book

In June of 2016, the MidAtlantic Business Group on Health conducted a multi-stakeholder forum to address this basic question: “If Obesity is a disease, why don’t we treat it like one?” The Obesity Forum included representatives from Providers, Purchasers, Public Health Agencies, and Health Plans. The Forum presented new information on 1) the physiology of Obesity; 2) attitudes and stigma associated with Obesity, including on the part of the healthcare Provider Community; 3) a lack of Health Plan data on their Obese Populations; and 4) underutilized resources for weight management in the community.

The result was a new and different awareness of the challenges to addressing the Obesity crisis. This new approach will include at least the following objectives:

1. Eliminating the stigma associated with Obesity
2. Encouraging the Healthcare Provider community to code, advise, and refer to treatment, whether behavioral, pharmacological, or surgical
3. Clarifying coverage policies for treatment
4. Improving identification of the obese population in Health Plans, and enrollment in weight management programs

This guide is intended to provide a road map for other coalitions to 1) engage local constituencies to understand Obesity as a disease; 2) identify the multiple players needed to effectively tackle this challenge in communities, and 3) communicate the importance of Primary Care Physicians in engaging their patients. It will help other coalitions:

- Develop an engagement approach that is focused on establishing partnerships for local coalitions and local Medical Groups
- Locate expert speaker recommendations by topic
- Link to existing content from credible 3rd parties
- Develop a budget for actualizing Local Obesity Forums
- Recruit local discussion participants

Please use this guide book as a starting place to develop your own Forum, and identify your own best place to start in tackling this pervasive and costly condition.

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Introduction and Forum Strategy

Introduction

The purpose of the Obesity Forum is not to supply answers, but rather to highlight barriers and challenges to addressing Obesity. We suggest that the Forum Host facilitate the Forum. To begin the conference, the host could briefly remind the participants of things they already know:

1. Obesity is prevalent in the population, and has been increasing at an alarming rate.
2. Obesity brings with it a number of comorbidities, including diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol. Along with the expense associated with the conditions themselves, they also carry the risk of complications, such as heart disease, stroke, renal failure, and episodic hospitalizations, all of which entail an even larger economic impact.
3. AMA Classification. In 2013, the American Medical Association joined a number of leading organizations that have previously made this classification, including the National Institutes of Health (1998), the Social Security Administration (1999), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (2004), The Obesity Society (2008) and the American Association for Clinical Endocrinology (2012).

So, if Obesity is prevalent, harmful, expensive, and has been classified as a disease, this Forum's Purpose is to explore barriers to the question "Why don't we treat Obesity as a disease?", from the perspective of these three relevant parties:

1. Physician
2. Health Plan
3. Purchaser

Forum Strategy

The strategy/format of this Forum is to present information related to each represented constituent, and then open the floor to discussion and even debate about each section.

Forum Agenda (Information/Discussion)

1. Is Obesity a Disease?
 - a. Purpose: Lay out the physiology of Obesity, and the scientific rational behind classifying Obesity as a disease.
 - b. Resource:

To locate an expert speaker, consult your local academic institutions, or contact:
STOP Obesity Alliance <http://stopobesityalliance.org/>
Christine Gallagher, General Contact cggallagher@email.gwu.edu
Scott Kahan, Medical Director kahan@nationalweight.org
2. Member Issues
 - a. Purpose: Review personal and environmental challenges facing members dealing with Obesity, including provider and worksite bias, and personal attitudes
 - b. Resource

To locate an expert speaker, consult your local advocacy group, or contact:
Obesity Action Coalition <http://stopobesityalliance.org/>
Speakers Bureau: National Office, (800) 717-3117 or info@obesityaction.org
Ted Kyle, Treasurer, ted.kyle@conscienhealth.org (412) 206-9303
3. Employer Reaction-Discussion
 - a. Purpose: Test employer acceptance of the concepts of “Obesity as a Disease” and “Obesity Bias”. Of course, other groups may speak up if they wish, as well.
 - b. Resource

Recruit 3-4 Employer Members. A mix of progressive and conservative participants is suggested, if that can be discerned/predicted.
Suggested Discussion Questions are in the Emails and Discussion Questions Section
4. Physician Barriers
 - a. Purpose: Show that physicians are not talking to obese patients about the health risks associated with obesity. Identify potential barriers to physician screening, intervention, and referral.
 - b. Resource

Obesity Action Coalition <http://stopobesityalliance.org/>
Speakers Bureau: National Office, (800) 717-3117 or info@obesityaction.org
Pam Davis, Board Member pamdavisconsulting@gmail.com (615) 414-4094
5. Physician Reaction-Discussion
 - a. Purpose: Testing physician acceptance of physicians lack of alerting patients to weight risk, and referring to support/treatment; and whether physicians agree with the barriers suggested.

- b. Resource
 - Contact local medical societies for representatives/participation. A mix of obesity-interested and obesity-agnostic physicians is preferred if possible. Suggested Discussion Questions are in the Emails and Discussion Questions Section
- 6. Health Plan Performance
 - a. Purpose: Highlight the low numbers of patients identified and participating in health plan obesity support programs, despite the relatively good quality of those programs, and efforts by plans to support patients' weight management.
 - b. Resource
 - Contact local Health Plans for representatives/participation. Use the eValue8 Slide Presentation to highlight gaps in identification/participation.
- 7. Obesity Treatment Overview
 - a. Purpose: Highlight the presence of community resources for treating/preventing Obesity. Provide analysis of the quality/acceptance/cost benefit of such programs treatments.
 - b. Resource(s)
 - i. Lifestyle/Behavior Modification
 - Local Health Department; Diabetes Prevention Program
 - ii. Pharmacology
 - Local School of Pharmacy, Benefits Consultant Pharmacy Specialist
 - iii. Surgery
 - Local Bariatric Center of Excellence
- 8. Advisor Reaction
 - a. Purpose: Test whether benefits consultants and health plans are comfortable advising their clients to cover and promote weight management treatment and support resources. Suggested Discussion Questions are in the Emails and Discussion Questions Section
 - b. Resource
 - i. Consultants
 - Recruit 2-3 benefits consultants
 - ii. Health Plans
 - Recruit several health plan representatives, preferably Medical Directors, Pharmacy Directors, or Wellness/Disease Management specialists.
- 9. General discussion: Next Steps
 - Purpose: Identify whether the group agrees that moving forward to align stakeholders to address Obesity in the community is desirable and feasible. If so, discuss possible focus areas for next steps.

Forum Participant Engagement

In this guide, we recommend inviting a broad range of stakeholders to the Forum. Each of the stakeholders serves a purpose in the meeting, and has a motivation for participating. They will realize different benefits from participation. In this section, we will describe those various participants, including their role in the discussion, “what’s in it for them”, and what they might take away from the Forum. We suggest that you demonstrate an understanding of the various constituencies’ position in your invitation, and that you acknowledge their past efforts in addressing Obesity.

We suggest seating participants in a U-shaped seating arrangement, to encourage discussion and interaction. We also suggest assigning seating, with representatives from similar stakeholders seated together (Purchasers together, Physicians together, etc.) This will make it easier for the participants to focus and follow the discussion during the feedback/reaction discussions.

Recruiting Speakers

The speakers we suggest as part of our agenda will provide a credible source for information. Each of the sections of the day are backed by research and evidence, and our speakers are the experts on the information we want to convey. They are a part of organizations whose mission it is to educate the community about seeing Obesity in a new, more productive way. They will also see the chance to educate employers, the ultimate payor, as a unique opportunity. They will emerge with an understanding of how purchasers think, and the dynamics between the other stakeholders in the system.

Recruiting Participants:

What they have to say:

“One of the most thought-provoking sessions I've been to in a very long time. Thanks for raising awareness around this very serious issue!” – Wellness Manager, 22000 employee health system

“Thank you so much for including me in the Obesity Forum yesterday. I was so impressed by how well thought-out and informative the presentations were. As you know, our City Health Department is working to partner with businesses in Baltimore so it was incredibly helpful to be present to hear about health issues from the lens of employers. Thank you so much for your support for our work at the Health Department.” Health Officer, major city health

“Thank you for hosting a very interesting and educational conference yesterday on Obesity. As always, we are happy to participate as you see fit and we value the opportunity to provide input from the family physician’s perspective. We also welcome the chance, as well, to listen and learn of other experiences and points of view from employers, health plans, etc. Congratulations on another successful meeting of the minds.” – Executive Director, state primary care physician association

“As we are working on obesity as a priority, we are happy to continue to be involved in this discussion. As we mentioned, we are working on many obesity initiatives throughout our collective jurisdictions, and work hard to align activities and programs. We also appreciate the interest in the National Diabetes Prevention Program, and are happy to provide more information, etc, if needed.” Director of Chronic Disease Prevention, state health department

“Thank you for the invitation to participate, and I was happy to attend the event last week. It was interesting to hear the perspectives of the business community, and refreshing to see them come together with providers, insurers, state/local public health, and others to take on this complex problem. I was also pleased to see even during the course of the day that some people’s views began to shift from obesity simply being a “lack of personal control” problem to a real awareness that there is so much more than that and that its causes are truly multifactorial. Looking forward to the report, and let me know how I can be of assistance in next steps moving forward. Nicely done last week—it was well put together!” – State Legislator

“Thanks for organizing an interesting meeting. I think it definitely furthers everyone’s desire to be healthy and make our medical system more prevention oriented.” – Regional Medical Director, major national health plan

“It was very informative and it's always good to have an opportunity to speak with peers at other companies.” -- Director, Employee Benefits Division, 100,000 employee state government

Recruiting Purchasers

a. Why invite them?

Coalition-member Purchasers already know that Obesity is a major healthcare cost driver. They have also probably been working on the problem for a few years. They very likely have programs in place that have relatively low participation rates, and have not been able to significantly show improvement, though they may have sporadic incremental success (biggest loser contests, etc.)

b. What’s in it for them?

This program will shed new light for them on the physiology of Obesity, the performance of physicians and health plans in managing Obesity in a population, and resources available to address the challenge. Purchasers will leave with a better understanding of the challenges facing obese members, and the role they play in engaging other stakeholders in successfully managing Obesity in their covered population.

Recruiting Physicians

a. Why invite them?

Physicians play an important role in motivating patients to manage their weight. Studies show that patients are far more likely to engage in weight management if their physicians advise them to take action. However, physicians may have false beliefs about payment, and may not be aware of community resources to which patients can be

referred. They absolutely need to be part of the conversation about helping their patients manage weight.

b. What's in it for them?

As payment reform gains momentum, more physicians have incentives to manage population health, as opposed to concentrating on volume of services. Physicians also appreciate the opportunity to connect directly with commercial payers, without the buffer of health plans or PBMs.

Recruiting Public Health Officials

a. Why invite them?

Reducing Obesity rates is a priority for every state department of health, of course. Additionally, the CDC has worked with most of them to establish networks of community Diabetes Prevention Programs. DPP has well-defined criteria for inclusion, and focuses heavily on nutrition and physical activity.

b. What's in it for them?

The DPP programs are significantly underused, and would benefit from increased physician referrals. Additionally, the CDC is encouraging public health departments to create public-private partnerships, so public health officials are encouraged to connect with commercial purchasers.

Recruiting Health Plans

a. Why invite them?

Health Plans act as the Purchaser representatives to both members and providers, and can exert influence on both those stakeholders through payment, coverage, and benefit design practices and recommendations.

b. What's in it for them?

Plans have created comprehensive patient support programs, but they are very much underused, so the Plans need physicians to code for obesity, and refer patients into these programs. Additionally, the Forum provides an opportunity for plans to interact with existing and potential clients in a non-sales environment.

Recruiting Benefits Consultants

a. Why invite them?

Consultants play a huge role in purchaser program and coverage decisions. Each consultant at the Forum can influence not only their direct clients, but other consultants at their firms, potentially spreading the Forum's results to many purchasers.

b. What's in it for them?

Like Health Plan representatives, the Forum provides Consultants an opportunity to interact with existing and potential clients in a non-sales environment. Consultants also value learning about population health challenges and health system dynamics that they can share with their clients and prospects.

Example Registration List

Organization	Role
National Center for Weight and Wellness	Expert/Physiology of Obesity
ConscienHealth	Expert/Weight Bias
Hospital Corporation of America	Expert/Physician Barriers
Bon Secours Health System	Employer
McCormick & Co., Inc.	Employer
National Business Coalition on Health	Employer
State of Maryland	Employer
AARP	Employer
MABGH	Coalition
Md. Academy of Family Physicians	Physician
Ulmer Family Medicine, AAMG	Physician
Anne Arundel Medical Group	Physician
MD DHMH	Public Health
DC Department of Health	Public Health
DC Department of Health	Public Health
Maryland Health Care Commission	Public Health
Baltimore City Health Department	Public Health
NORC at U of Chicago	Expert
Hays Companies	Consultant
AJ Gallagher	Consultant
United Health Care	Health Plan
Cigna Health Care	Health Plan
BCBS Association	Health Plan
State of Maryland/Johns Hopkins	State Legislature
U of MD School of Pharmacy	Expert/Pharmacy
Maryland Metabolic Institute	Expert/Bariatric Surgery

Sample Obesity Forum Budget

Room and facility charges (Incl. food and beverage and A/V)	\$4000
Copying and Materials	\$1500
Labor cost associated with program planning, Participant research and outreach, and other logistical labor	\$3500
Speaker Travel Expense	\$1000
Total	\$10,000

Panel Discussion Questions

During the day, the proposed Agenda calls for several panel discussions. The intention of each panel is to reveal dynamics between the different constituencies, and each constituency's readiness to address Obesity as a disease. Following are emails that can be sent to each different panel, that can help them prepare for the discussion, and questions that can be used to elicit conversation between the panel and the rest of the group.

Physician Email and Questions

Dear <<INSERT PHYSICIAN REPRESENTATIVE NAMES>>:

Thanks for attending our Obesity Forum on <<INSERT DATE>>. What we're looking for is a reality check from the world of Primary Care Physicians. So you speak for yourself, and also for your observations of Primary Care Physicians in general. After our presentation on "Physician Barriers to Discussing Obesity with Their Patients", we will you to participate in an informal "panel" discussion, which I will moderate. I will pose some very basic questions, mostly related to that presentation on Physician Barriers:

1. Overall, does the presentation ring true?
2. Which of her points seemed especially valid and important?
3. Are there issues that you think were overstated?
4. What did the speaker miss?

There may be questions and comments from the audience at large, as well, which I'll moderate. We hope that this entire meeting will be interactive and conversational

Thanks for sharing your perspective!

Employer Email and Questions

Dear <<INSERT EMPLOYER REPRESENTATIVE NAMES>>:

Thanks for attending our Obesity Forum on <<INSERT DATE>>. What we're looking for is a reality check from the world of Healthcare Purchasers. So you speak for yourself, and also for your observations of Purchasers in general. Our first two presentations will feature the concept of "Obesity as a Disease", and "What Makes This So Hard?: Complexity and Bias in Obesity Management". After those presentations, I'll ask you to form an informal "panel discussion" on what you've heard. Generally, this is the type of information I'd like to cover:

1. Is the information new to you? What other information would you like?
2. Does your organization view obesity as a disease?
3. Do you cover treatments accordingly?
4. Do you need additional information to set your company's internal health strategy toward obesity?

There may be questions and comments from the audience at large, as well, which I'll moderate. We hope that this entire meeting will be interactive and conversational.

Thanks for sharing your perspective!

Health Plan and Consultant Email and Questions

Dear <<INSERT HEALTH PLAN AND CONSULTANT REPRESENTATIVE NAMES>>:

Thanks for attending our Obesity Forum on <<INSERT DATE>>. What we're looking for is a reality check from the world of Health Plans and Consultants. So you speak for yourself, and also for your observations of your colleagues in general. Our last presentation will feature information on Obesity Treatment Options. After those presentations, we will ask the you to form an informal "panel discussion" on what you've heard.

Generally, this is the type of information I'd like to cover:

5. Is the information new to you? What other information would you like?
6. Does your organization view obesity as a disease?
7. How do you advise your clients/customers about covering these options?
8. Do you need additional information to set your company's internal health strategy toward obesity?

There may be questions and comments from the audience at large, as well, which I'll moderate. We hope that this entire meeting will be interactive and conversational.

Thanks for sharing your perspective!