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Sizing healthcare to fit and not offend the very large patient

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NEWS



Bariatric Management Innovation team members are Otago University senior lecturer Lesley Gray, Essential HelpCare chief executive Todd Bishop and Victoria University lecturer Caz Hales

Large people often felt sadness and despair at their dealings with health professionals, says Lesley Gray of her work in weight management programmes in the UK.

At the launch last month of a new collaboration aimed at filling knowledge gaps in this field, Ms Gray said most of her clients had not been offered weight management support and advice.

A major US study, reported in 2012, came to the same finding among its participants and also said “weight” and “unhealthy weight” were the most desirable terminology for providers to use; “morbidly obese”, “fat” and “obese” were the least desirable.¹

Ms Gray has been exploring some of these issues as a researcher and senior lecturer at the University of Otago, Wellington, and has recently become co-leader of the Bariatric Management Innovation.

A partnership between academia and industry, it aims to engage in research and innovation that supports the development and management of safe, appropriate, equitable care for very large patients.

Through the Bariatric Management Innovation, Ms Gray will lead a study asking health professionals and patients what language they prefer and in what context.

A partnership of Otago and Victoria Universities and private company Essential HelpCare, the Collaboration last month ran seminars opening up discussion of health professionals’ experience treating, caring for and communicating with very large patients.

The meetings drew out many anecdotes of the difficulties experienced by bariatric (not just bariatric surgery) patients where healthcare facilities aren’t well supported or equipped, Ms Gray says.

Bariatric means people with a body mass index of 40 or more.

The Ministry of Health has reported that 4 per cent of adults in New Zealand have a BMI of ≥ 40 and 5 per cent of children have a BMI of ≥ 35 .

Innovation co-leader Caz Hales, in a PhD thesis on these patients, says obesity is defined as abnormal or excessive body fat accumulation large enough to adversely impair health and reduce longevity.²

She says morbid obesity, or BMI greater or equal to 40, is the fastest-growing category of obesity in developed countries.

Dr Hales is a lecturer in Victoria University's graduate school of nursing and a nurse in the patient-at-risk service at Capital & Coast DHB.

Todd Bishop, who runs Essential HelpCare, is the third of the lead trio. Mr Bishop's company supplies equipment suitable for large patients and provides support and training in using it.

The Bariatric Management Innovation is open to interested people to subscribe and is in contact with many researchers and clinicians beyond its three partners.