

# Person-Centered Language in Publications on Obesity within Sports Medicine Journals

Jason Webb, B.A.,<sup>1</sup> Trey Gooch, B.S.,<sup>1</sup> Kaylee Mach, B.S.,<sup>1</sup> Arjun K. Reddy, B.A.,<sup>2</sup> J. Michael Anderson D.O.,<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Scott D.O.,<sup>3</sup> Jake X. Checketts D.O.,<sup>3</sup> Lance Walker, P.T., M.S.,<sup>4</sup> Micah Hartwell, Ph.D.<sup>1,5</sup>

1. Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine at Cherokee Nation, Office of Medical Student Research, Tahlequah, Oklahoma. 2. Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine. 3. Office of Medical Student Research, Tulsa, Oklahoma. 3. Oklahoma State University Medical Center, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Tulsa, Oklahoma. 4. Oklahoma State University, Human Performance and Nutrition Research Institute, Stillwater, Oklahoma 5. Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Tulsa, Oklahoma

## INTRODUCTION

- Stigma is a negative social attitude linked to a characteristic of an individual that may be regarded as a mental, physical, or social fault.<sup>1</sup>
- In obesity, weight-based stigma can lead to adverse outcomes in health and exacerbations of the disease.<sup>2</sup>
- When it comes to seeking medical care, patients with obesity who perceived weight prejudice from their primary care provider were less successful in losing weight than patients who did not perceive negative judgment. Therefore, limiting stigmatizing language in the medical community can foster an environment to encourage weight management.<sup>2,3</sup>

## OBJECTIVE

- Our primary objective was to determine if PCL guidelines specific to obesity have been properly obeyed in the most interacted with sports medicine journals.

## METHODS

- We searched within PubMed for obesity-related articles between 2019 and 2022 published in the top ten most interacted sports medicine journals based on Google Metrics data.
- A predetermined list of stigmatizing and non-PCL terms/language was searched within each article.
- Non-PCL terms included the following: obese, morbid, extreme, fat\* (label or adjective of the person), diabetic(S), large\* (larger), overweight, chubby, heavy, problem, suffer.

## RESULTS

- 198 articles were sampled, of which 58.6% were found to be not compliant with PCL guidelines.
- The most common non-PCL terms were “obese” being used in 49.5% of articles, with “overweight” being the next most common stigmatizing term at 40.4%.
- Stigmatizing labels such as (heavy, heavier, heaviness), (fat as an adjective), and morbid appeared in articles, but at a lower rate.

Table 1. Frequency of PCL compliance by journal investigated.

Journal	Non-PCL (116) No. (%)	PCL Compliant (82) No. (%)	Total (198) No. (%)
British Journal of Sports Medicine	5 (62.50)	3 (37.50)	8 (4.04)
International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance	0 (0)	1 (100)	1 (0.51)
Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport	5 (45.45)	6 (54.55)	11 (5.56)
Journal of Sports Sciences	29 (74.36)	10 (25.64)	39 (19.70)
Journal of Strength and Conditioning	7 (50.00)	7 (50.00)	14 (7.07)
Knee Surgery, Sports Traumatology, Arthroscopy	12 (75.00)	4 (25.00)	16 (8.08)
Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise	33 (62.26)	20 (37.74)	53 (26.77)
Sports Medicine	5 (71.43)	2 (28.57)	7 (3.54)
The American Journal of Sports Medicine	1 (25.00)	3 (75.00)	4 (2.02)
The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity	19 (42.22)	26 (57.78)	45 (22.73)

## CONCLUSION

- Our study shows that there is a severe lack of adherence to PCL guidelines in the most interacted sports medicine journals.
- All journals, including the most prestigious ones, should adopt and execute PCL guidelines to prevent the spread of demeaning language in the medical community.

## IMPORTANCE OF FINDINGS

- Negative associations between stigmatizing language and individuals with obesity will only persist if more is not done.
- Ensuring that person-centered language is used in published literature can help create the needed separation between a patient’s identity and their disease.

## REFERENCES

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