

3rd International Conference and Exhibition on **Obesity & Weight Management**

December 01-03, 2014 DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel San Francisco Airport, USA

Healthy weight programme for overweight and obese adolescents: A feasibility study

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Childhood obesity has reached epidemic proportions globally¹. In the UK, the number of obese children has tripled over the last 20 years: at least 10% of six-year-olds and 17% of 15-year-olds are now clinically obese². The purpose of the present study was to develop and test the implementation of a healthy weight programme that would inform the design for a definitive trial of a community-based weight management programme for overweight and obese adolescents. The study used mixed quantitative and qualitative research methods with two target groups, comprising obese adolescents aged 12-16 years and their parents/guardians. The study was conducted in three phases. In Phase 1 (screening), a total of 1821 adolescents were contacted via three secondary schools in Aberdeen using a short questionnaire on self-reported height and weight. From those 47 (26 girls and 21 boys) adolescents replied. Fifteen with self-reported BMI ≥ 91 st percentile for their age and gender, in relation to the UK 1990 growth charts, were invited for anthropometric, body fat and blood pressure measurements. In Phase 2 (intervention), a total of 15 (9 girls and 6 boys) identified adolescents with mean BMI 96.1 (SD 2.1) and mean age 13.4 years (SD 1.24) attended a 12 week programme comprising of bi-weekly sessions (1.5 hours) of mixed education (nutrition and behaviour modification) and physical activity between March and June 2014. The sessions were run by sports centre coaches and involved taster sessions of a wide range of sports plus hands on food activities (food labelling, menu planning, cooking session and supermarket trips for making healthy food choices and fruit/vegetable tasting). Participants were taught key behaviour change methods such as goal setting, overcoming hurdles and implementation of a reward scheme to help motivate them to improve their health. Six adolescents dropped out of the programme due to minor illnesses, academic examinations and school trips. In Phase 3 (focus group), 9 adolescents and 8 parents attended focus group discussions or one-to-one interviews. Adolescents reported that the programme allowed them to discover a wide range of opportunities such as to try out new activities, meet new people, make friends and build upon their social and emotional health. During adolescence many young people still rely heavily upon their parents, thus parental support is one of the key aspects within this intervention. Inviting parents to attend regular meetings with the programme staff, allowed them to provide continual motivation and support to their children. Our focus group findings on views and experiences of obese adolescents and parents on a variety of aspects of the programme's design, structure and delivery of a healthy weight management programme supported the key components (nutrition, activity and behaviour modification) of the intervention and provided valuable suggestions for improving recruitment to inform the design of a definitive study of this approach to obesity management in adolescents.

1. WHO. Childhood overweight and obesity, 2008. www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/publications/
2. Government Office for Science. Foresight. Tackling obesities: future choices-project report. 2nd ed. 2007. (<http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Obesity/14.pdf>)

Biography

Tuya Chuluuntulga practicing General Medical Practitioner in Aberdeen, UK. I graduated at the National Medical University of Mongolia. After my initial clinical training in Mongolia, I moved to the UK to extend my research and clinical experience. I have been working in the UK since 1996 and obtained a MSc in Human Nutrition and a PhD in Medicine from the University of Aberdeen. I completed my training in General Practice in the UK. I was awarded the CSO Primary Care Research Career Award in June 2009. I have a special interest in acupuncture, diabetes and obesity. I have extensive research training and clinical experience in weight management.

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