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Exploring the patient journey in weight loss: A social network analysisLynn Cheong and Nicole Freene
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Statement of the Problem: The rising prevalence and burden of obesity represents an important global health issue. Despite effective dietary and lifestyle interventions, few succeed with long-term maintenance of weight loss. Whilst interventions have been developed to serve the best interest of overweight and obese individuals, none have analyzed the social relationships that individuals may develop or require as they attempt to lose weight over time. There is a need to address the interplay between weight management and social networks. Using a novel approach, this project aims to explore the networks of overweight and obese individuals over time, by identifying the people with whom they interact with in their weight loss attempt, to better understand the influences of social interactions on weight loss behavior and outcomes.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: Social Network Analysis (SNA) is an approach that allows the detailed study of complex communication and interaction patterns. It is based on the theoretical framework of social network theory. This project employed a longitudinal mixed-methods approach to SNA. Participants were recruited through advertisements in various healthcare settings. Data were collected at four points over a 12-month period through surveys and a semi-structured interview at completion. The network software, E-Net, was used to generate visual representations of individual's networks, while qualitative analysis of data assisted in the interpretation of network structures, providing an insider's view.

Findings: A total of 17 individuals were recruited. Participants reported small weight loss networks (median 3, range 1-7) which predominantly included family, friends and coworkers.

Conclusion & Significance: Participants indicated that the most influential weight loss connection was their spouse. Despite their reported desire to lose weight, minimal changes was observed in existing networks even with a lack of weight loss over time. This research highlights the need for future interventions to consider with whom individuals are willing to engage in their weight loss journey.

Biography

Lynn Cheong is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Pharmacy at the University of Canberra in Australia. She is a Registered Pharmacist with a wide array of experience in hospital and community pharmacy, as well as government and education. She continues to remain professionally active and strives to advance the role of pharmacists in improving patient and health system outcomes. Her research interest is in the application of social network analysis theories and techniques in health service research. Her research lies in the areas of patient-centered care, quality use of medicines, interprofessional education and practice.

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