

Improvements in mental well-being during weight loss on a slimming on referral programme

Given the rising prevalence and escalating costs of obesity, innovative approaches should be sought to establish effective weight management programmes which are both sustainable and address health inequalities. Self-esteem and mental well-being are important outcome measures in any weight management programme.

A slimming on referral programme was set up in Southern Derbyshire to investigate the feasibility of referring patients to a local Slimming World group. Outcomes measured included attendance, weight loss, general well-being and participants' views of the scheme. 107 obese patients from two GP practices were offered vouchers covering membership and 12 weeks' attendance at a local Slimming World group. After the subsidised period participants were able to continue attending and became responsible for payment of weekly fees. Follow up arrangements were made in the primary care setting at both 3 and 6 months. An important element of the slimming on referral scheme was that referred patients were not made to feel any different to paying members. The Slimming World approach is to empower members to have the skills and confidence to make healthy lifestyle changes over a sustained period of time. A motivating group process is used which recognises that individuals may need different levels of support and that each member is able to contribute to the group. Group Consultants are local people who have themselves used the approach to lose weight and maintain weight loss.

91 patients (85%) enrolled at a Slimming World group. 62 completed the 12 week subsidised period (defined as attending at least 10 meetings). 47 participants decided to pay the weekly fees themselves to continue after 12 weeks, with 34 completing 24 weeks. Participants' mental well-being was compared with a representative sample from a Southern Derbyshire health survey. Mental well-being was assessed using questionnaires measuring the following aspects of mood; feeling calm and peaceful, having a lot of energy, and feeling downhearted and low, at six levels of rating (all of the time, most of the time, a good bit of the time, some of the time, little of the time, none of the time). Data presented show values for 'most of the time'. Statistics represent Chi squared analysis run across all levels. Compared with the Southern Derbyshire sample, the obese patients generally had low ratings of well-being before enrolment. However, improvements in all aspects measured were seen in those completing both 12 weeks (calm $P=0.001$, energy, $P=0.001$, downhearted $P=0.015$) and 24 weeks (calm $P=0.02$, energy $P=0.001$, downhearted $P=0.001$). Mean weight loss of those completing 12 weeks was 6.4% (SD 3.0) and in those completing 24 weeks 11.3% (SD 4.6). Qualitative data supports these findings with patients viewing slimming on referral very positively, for example, 'I was helped at a time when I had a very low self-esteem, the group Consultant was excellent and very supportive. The other slimmers were brilliant, a good laugh was had by all and we lost weight!'

	South Derbyshire sample	Slimming on referral participants		
		All those Enrolled (n91)	12 week completers (n62)	
			Enrolment	12 weeks
Feeling calm and peaceful	38%	28%	29%	46%*
Having a lot of energy	41%	9%	12%	28%*
Feeling downhearted and low	8%	23%	19%	7%†

Significantly different from enrolment: * $P < 0.01$, † $P < 0.02$.

Overweight and obese people need to be recognised as being particularly vulnerable in that they generally have a low self-esteem and self-confidence. The recommended target of 5-10% weight loss for health improvement can be achieved in a significant percentage of patients participating in slimming on referral. Furthermore, the study shows that referring patients to the Slimming World programme can significantly improve mental well-being.

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