



Media release

Obese patients difficult to manage in the emergency department

Patient obesity significantly increases the difficulty of their management in the emergency department (ED), a study of 750 patients has found.

Overweight and obese patients present more frequently to hospitals.

However, relatively little research has been undertaken into the effects of obesity on patient management.

The study, by Mr Jeremy Kam, advanced medical science student at the University of Melbourne, and Associate Professor David Taylor, Director of Emergency and General Medicine Research at the Austin Hospital, is published in the latest issue of *Emergency Medicine Australasia*, the journal of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine.

This was a cross-sectional survey of patients and medical, nursing, and radiography staff of the Austin Hospital ED undertaken between October 2008 and March 2009.

Doctors reported that physical examination, palpation of the chest or abdomen, finding anatomical landmarks, and general procedures were most affected by the level of obesity.

Nurses reported that patient positioning and mobilisation, assistance with clothes, and intravenous cannulation were most affected.

Radiographers reported that patient positioning and obtaining a good image were most affected.

Doctors reported more difficulties than nurses and radiographers.

Generally, management difficulty did not increase until the BMI was in the obese or morbidly obese range.

Globally, there are more than 1 billion and 300 million overweight and obese adults, respectively.

The prevalence of both is rising, with the largest relative increase being the morbidly obese.

The direct healthcare costs of obesity in developed countries have been estimated at 2%-7% of total healthcare costs.

The annual costs of treating obesity and its consequences in Australia are now estimated at \$830.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

To interview Associate Professor David Taylor, please phone Marilyn Bitomsky on 07 3371 3057 or 0412 884 114.

Media please note: An abbreviated version of this research was presented at the November 2009 scientific meeting of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine and it received some publicity at the time.

Issued for the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (phone 03 9320 0444) by Marilyn Bitomsky (phone 07 3371 3057 or 0412 884 114).

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