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The role of the nurse in the fight against childhood obesity

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Abstract

The issue of weight management for children and adolescents has been part of the healthcare agenda in the United States since the early 1960s. Yet, during the past 2 decades, a twofold increase has been seen in the rate of obesity among children; today approximately 25% of children in the United States between the ages of 6 and 17 are overweight. Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), 1976-1980 and 2003-2006, show the prevalence of obesity has increased for youth 6.5% to 17.0% for those ages 6-11 years; and from 5.0% to 17.6% for those ages 12–19 years.

Although the American Academy of Pediatrics ([AAP], 2003) issued a policy statement indicating grave concerns regarding the dramatic increase in the prevalence of childhood obesity and the resultant co-morbidities associated with significant lifelong health and financial burdens, the problem continues to escalate. Recently, Ogden, Carroll, Curtin, Lamb, and Flegal (2010) reported that the prevalence of high BMI in childhood has remained steady without a decline for 10 years; alarmingly, heavier boys may be getting even heavier.

Due to this alarming trend with children, it becomes imperative for nurses interfacing with children, and their parents or caregivers, to become invested in preventive interventions.

Biography

Elaine M. Rutkowski, Ph.D., RN, CNS is an associate Professor in the School of Nursing at California State University, Fullerton. She teaches in both the undergraduate and graduate nursing programs. She is an active researcher within the university's Center for Healthy Lifestyles and Prevention of Childhood Obesity as well as the University's Health Promotion Research Institute. She received her BSN from Villa Maria College in Erie, PA, in 1977, her MSN (and CNS in Community Health Nursing) from the University of Pennsylvania in 1981 and her Ph.D. from the University of San Diego in 2008. Her current research is focused on adolescent families and obesity, specifically in the lifestyle choices of these families.

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