

VIDEO_ Low carb for doctors (Part 5)

Dr. David Unwin: For many years I really struggled with bringing up the subject of obesity with my patients. I didn't really know how to begin. It seemed rude to tell patients that they were fat. And it's a shame really because I missed many opportunities. I've been working recently with some younger doctors trying to find ways for them to bring up the subject of obesity for their patients in a way that the patients are really happy with.

And this is what we've come up with really. Listen to the patient's problem first and then say something like, "You've mentioned that your knees are hurting "and they are very painful, I can see that's a problem for you. I just wonder whether your weight might be a factor for this. Are you interested in discussing this as an approach? Because I think it could help."

And having mentioned it and asked permission is very important that you then wait for permission, for the patient to say, "Yes it's okay." So you see what I'm doing here is the framing of your questions, so you've listened to the patients problem and then you're framing the idea of obesity in terms of this could be helpful for the problem the patient has mentioned and then you're waiting for permission.

So I'm saying to the patient, "Is this something you're interested in exploring?" And then I'm waiting. In five years I've only had one patient who hasn't given permission to discuss their weight. All the others have said, "Yes, I know I'm heavy." So all the other patients have said to me, "Yes this is something I'd like to explore."

I think it's so important that this is done in a collaborative way, so that you're not telling the patient they're fat. You're framing this as part of the solution to the problem that the patient has and then seeking permission. And then... often the next thing I do is I say, "Well if we're going to work on this together would you mind if we took away now so we've got the baseline and then we'll know when it improves?"

And again I'm seeking permission. And the number of patients that tell me they haven't been weighed for years and they're frightened of what the result will be, but the minute they buy in to that initial weighing is a really good sign that they're going to do something about it. So that we've changed something that I personally didn't like to ask about before into a completely caring thing.

It is not callous to ask about weight as long as you're doing it as part of the solution to the problem that the patient feels is important to them. So I hope you can see it doesn't have to be a problem.