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Addressing childhood obesity: An analysis of a school health policy

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Background: The childhood obesity epidemic has received epidemic proportions . There is an 19 % increase in prevalence of obesity in children and a 17% increase in adolescents over the last thirty years . Without question the impact of obesity on the overall health of children in the form of co-morbid conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease has been well-documented. As well, the economic toll , the cost of healthcare because of obesity is expected to rise to 100 billion by 2025 with current rates of childhood obesity.

Legislation mandating screening of children using BMI has been reported by several states as a beginning intervention . Today thirteen states have such screening and some of these also require reporting of the results to parents . Arkansas has the most data on the effects of screening and have shown no increase in obesity over the three years screening has been in place.

Method: This paper will first present the data on the effects of the screening policies on childhood obesity. The positive aspects of the screening program include parental notification and an opportunity for parents to participate in intervention/ early intervention . However, the drawbacks to such programs include issues related to the child's privacy, a significant need for resources, and lack of parental support for such programs. As well, the process of referral for treatment and follow-up for high BMIs may not in reality take place, leaving "awareness" as the only outcome.

Conclusions: BMI screening as it is mandated today may not make a significant impact on childhood obesity Other strategies such as removing calorie-dense foods from vending machines and instituting Physical Activity programs are initiatives in which schools might also engage. As the nation considers health policies related to obesity, attention must be paid to the pros and cons of the state mandated programs and their outcomes data.

Biography

Carol Soto is an Associate Professor at the City University of New York. Trained at Yale University and Teacher's College, Columbia University, she is currently a PhD candidate at Adelphi University, Long Island, N.Y. Her research focus is on childhood obesity and its' impact on the environment. Her interests also include health policy and childhood obesity. She has presented at research conferences focusing on childhood obesity and initiatives to combat this epidemic.