



Assisting Physicians in Eating Disorders Prevention

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As health professionals, physicians play an integral role in educating and assisting individuals who may be struggling with body image, eating, or weight concerns. In today's world, physicians are experiencing an increased burden to know about and screen for a variety of physical and psychological conditions. If we are to convince physicians to screen for eating issues as well, they must be given the training and sensitivity to screen for eating issues in as simple a method as possible.

One difference between medical health professionals and mental health professionals is that an MD is trained to *do*, where as a PhD is trained to *think*. Therefore, these professionals will assess and treat conditions differently. An MD gets frustrated without a solution, which may cause them to increase testing or overmedicate. They may also oversimplify a condition in attempt to find a solution or, in contrast, could be likely to overreact. When faced with a patient struggling with eating and weight issues, or even a clinical eating disorders, these responses are likely to cause the patient a great deal of anxiety, pain, and inappropriate and potentially damaging treatment.

Consider educating the physicians in your community with the following information and handouts included in your Coordinator Guide.

Tips for Assisting Physicians with Eating Disorders Prevention

Entry Points: There are many ways, both formal and informal to influence physicians.

Here are some ideas:

- Let your physicians and as many other physicians as possible know about NEDA.
- If you are a treatment professional, do the same when talking to your patients' doctors. Also make physicians aware of your services available to prevent and treat eating disorders.
- Offer to provide an in-service to the other physicians and staff of their professional association.
- Contact your state medical society. Offer to write an article for their newsletter. Give them literature from NEDA.



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Assisting Physicians in Eating Disorders Prevention: Page 1 of 1

- Find out if there is a local branch of the Academy of Pediatrics, Society of Adolescent Medicine, or American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Offer to present at a local meeting.
- If you are near a teaching hospital or medical school, contact the coordinators of the medical school curriculum. Offer to provide a lecture or lead a discussion group. Also, contact the director of residency training for pediatrics, family medicine, internal medicine, and ob-gyn. Offer to lecture at Grand Rounds or other medical meetings. Consider inviting residents to meet with groups of clients or individuals you work with to learn from them as experts on the personal experience of an eating disorder.

Danger Zones: Physicians, despite good intentions, often make the following mistakes. By developing an ongoing collaborative relationship, you may help them avoid these:

- Setting or agreeing to an artificially low body weight
- Sharing own concerns with food, weight, body image
- Expressing negative feelings regarding fat people
- Being over-concerned about the increase in obesity and therefore unable to identify pathogenic weight control
- Supporting restrictive dieting
- Not working collaboratively with other providers
- While attempting to support the patient or family, undermining treatment and reinforcing resistance

Recommended Handouts:

- Screening for Eating Disorders by Primary Care Physicians
- Addressing Eating Disorders as a Physicians: A 'Twelve Step' Program
- The Physician's Role in Eating Disorders Prevention
- Eating Disorders and the Physician: Recommended Reading
- What's Up Doc?
- Dental Complications of Eating Disorders: Information for Dental Practitioners

