In order to depolarize the debate, it is important to address the importance of an energy-restrictive diet and adequate physical exercise, as well as the different perspectives on weight management.

Many Registered Dietitians (RDs) have different perceptions of what a "healthy" weight/BMI is, and how the obesity epidemic should be addressed. Some RDs support the traditional efforts of an energy-restrictive diet and adequate physical exercise, while other RDs support the "Health at Every Size" (HAES) approach and its emphasis on body acceptance and intuitive eating. Conflicting opinions may cause inconsistent professional practice.

In order to attempt to depolarize the debate, it is important to investigate:

(a) what RDs define and believe to be "healthy" from a dietetic standpoint,
(b) their differences in the opinions and approaches on weight control,
(c) how their outlooks may affect how they counsel their clients on obesity management.

### Methods

- A convenience sample of about 10 RDs were obtained and selected in a purposive manner, via personal and professional contacts from local associations.
- RDs who were asked to participate in this study were chosen to produce a maximum variation sample, to recruit individuals who reflect a wide variety of perspectives and opinions on the topic of interest.
- Participants have varying genders, practice settings, lengths of occupation as RD, as well as varying dates and levels of education.
- Qualitative data were gathered through individual face-to-face or video call interviews.
- The interview consisted of two parts. The first part of the interview included asking questions about two hypothetical scenarios as detailed in Table 1. The scenarios and questions are originally from research performed by Chapman, et al., titled "Canadi an Dietitians’ Approaches to Counseling Adult Clients Seeking Weight-Management Advice." (2005). Questions regarding goal setting for each client aimed to expose how the RD would counsel those particular clients on weight management considering their situations.
- The second part of the interview consisted of open-ended questions that explored the RD’s opinion regarding what “healthy” means to them from a dietetic standpoint as follow-up from the first part of the interview, as well as their attitudes on weight management and HAES in their personal and professional practices.

### Results

- The thematic analysis resulted in five inter-related themes regarding:
  - RDs’ perceptions of “healthy”
  - Views on the importance of weight management
  - Opinions on energy-restrictive dieting
  - Knowledge of and attitudes towards HAES
  - Methods of counseling and goal setting

### Discussion

- It was found that the RDs indeed focused on making lifestyle changes when counseling clients on weight management, whether that is directed towards the goal of losing weight or maintaining weight.
- RDs’ practices seem to be consistent with the guidelines recommended by the Academy, as the RDs stressed the importance of individualized plans based on diet, physical activity, and behavioral strategies.
- However, some RDs have differing goals when it comes to weight management. While the Academy suggests an individualized reduced-calorie diet as the basis for weight management, some RDs have completely abandoned this way of thinking and have adopted a "Health at Every Size" approach.
- When an obese client had risk factors for chronic disease, majority of the RDs counseled with the intent to reduce them. On the other hand, a couple of the RDs did not attribute the obesity to the risk of developing chronic disease and instead focused on manageable lifestyle changes with no concern for weight or BMI status.

### Conclusion

- Findings of this study show that RDs may have differing opinions when it comes to the healthy vs. weight theory. The opposing philosophies (energy-restrictive vs. HAES) can lead to a wide range of counseling approaches, which may cause discrepancies among dietetic professionals, their clients, and other healthcare professionals.
- It is important to continue research on the treatment of obesity as the prevalence of obesity and obesity-related chronic disease rises. The need for a defined dietetic approach to weight and chronic disease management has become apparent.
- It is also important for RDs to be mindful and open towards a variety of perspectives surrounding weight management and imperative that RDs stay current on research to provide the most effective counseling.

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### For more information

Please contact kishimoto74@gmail.com. More information on this and related projects can be obtained at www.csulb.edu.