

*Dear Reader,*

Welcome to the summer issue of our newsletter. It's been another exciting and busy period for Weight Concern - we are proud to announce that between all of our projects we are addressing just about every part of the government's obesity action plan.

The **Ten Top Tips** campaign, our obesity prevention collaboration with Cancer Research UK, has really taken off, with online developments underway (p1). Other weight loss resource projects are also building momentum - our **leaflet for parents of overweight children** is now available on our website (p4).

Action for health professionals is also going strong, with thousands of GP practices across the nation receiving weight management packs containing '**Raising the**

**issue'** advice developed by Weight Concern (p5) and more **training** dates in the diary (p2).

Our weight control programme, Shape-Up, continues to grow in popularity and we are thrilled to announce that **Chesterfield Healthy Living Centre** will soon be running groups (p2) - hopefully they will start a trend for HLCs all over the country.

The first ever Shape-Up group designed specifically for a group of **patients** has also kicked off at the Royal Free Hospital (p3). And we are pleased to announce the appointment of Charlene Shoneye to help us tailor Shape-Up to meet the specific needs of **Afro-Caribbean women** (p3).

We are also delighted to welcome on board **Dr Ian Campbell**, who joined us in April as Honorary Medical Director. You can learn more about his ambitions for Weight

Concern in our interview (p6).

Finally we would like to thank everyone who contacted us with useful **feedback** on the last newsletter, which reached a massive audience, ranging from health professionals and government bodies to community workers and Big Panel members.

We are really keen to **spread our news**, so please feel free to send the newsletter on to anyone you think may find it useful. And we really want to keep covering the issues that interest you, so please keep letting us know what you think.

Best wishes,



Dr Susan Carnell (Newsletter Editor)

## CHANGING YOUR LIFE ONLINE The Ten Top Tips go live

Preventing obesity has never been more important, with new research revealing links to an ever-growing range of health problems.

With this in mind, Weight Concern was delighted to team up with Cancer Research UK's Reduce the Risk campaign to launch the Ten Top Tips: ten simple 'healthy habits' that have been proven to keep weight down and should therefore reduce cancer risk.

### Taking the first step

Individuals and organisations interested in the Ten Top Tips have been able to order copies of the leaflet since the campaign began in January, and the demand has been overwhelming.

"From January to March we sent out 81,022 leaflets and 36,210 shopping cards," said Louise Rhodes, Reduce the Risk project manager at CRUK. "And that rate shows no sign of slowing."

"Weight Concern is thrilled to have been instrumental in this successful part of the campaign," said Caroline Swain, our Executive Director.

"Hopefully the Ten Top Tips will really help people to take action to control their weight, as well as increase awareness of the link between obesity and cancer, which is still not widely known."



Super Dietitian: Weight Concern dietitian Alison Chipperfield will be keeping the TTT Five in order

### Providing support

Changing well-established habits can be challenging and people wanting to integrate the Ten Top Tips into their daily lives may need help.

So Weight Concern has been working with CRUK to develop a web-based interactive support tool. The Ten Top Tips Web Diary will track five people following the tips over 10 weeks. Each one will have the opportunity to receive web-based feedback from a specialist dietitian.

"We hope this will be a useful resource to all 'Ten Top Tippers'," said Alison Chipperfield, who will be providing the feedback.

"Every week our panel of five will write an online diary so web-viewers can follow along. They will also answer questions about their weight, how they are feeling, what is working well, and what they are struggling with. We can then monitor their progress and suggest ways to handle specific issues".

"Our clinical work suggests that hearing about how others deal with things can also help people solve their own problems. So hopefully this will benefit everyone, not just our soon-to-be famous five!"

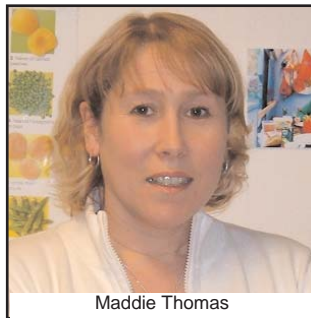
Health professionals can order Ten Top Tips leaflets in bulk from [www.reducetherisk.org.uk](http://www.reducetherisk.org.uk).

## REACHING OUT *Shape-Up* in the community

One of Weight Concern's main aims is to encourage the inclusion of evidence-based behavioural weight management programmes in local obesity strategies. Straightforward and low-cost to run, the Shape-Up programme is ideally placed to fulfil this need.

So we were delighted when Maddie Thomas, team leader for community nutrition advisers and health trainers at Chesterfield Sure Start Healthy Living Centre, signed herself and her team up for Shape-Up facilitator training in May.

"The PCT already had several weight management programmes underway in the area served by the PCT, but nothing quite like Shape-Up," explains Maddie. "What we were looking for was a programme that would provide a 10 week course for people who were overweight, and which people could either refer themselves to, or be referred."



Maddie Thomas

### All aboard

Maddie's place of work has a successful but rather unconventional set-up. Instead of the usual community centre building with four solid walls and a roof, Maddy and her team deliver health promotion and care from a blue, 40 foot double-decker bus.

"It sounds mad, but it's surprisingly spacious," laughs Maddie. "The bus has a small training room, a health suite, a toilet and baby change, and a fully equipped kitchen!"



Health on the move: Chesterfield's mobile Sure Start healthy living centre

### High hopes

The bus travels a comprehensive route round the community, stopping regularly at a range of venues from town centres to supermarket car parks. And Chesterfield Sure Start and Healthy Living Centre now has over 3400 families registered with the service.

So there are high expectations for attendance at Shape-Up sessions, the first of which will actually be held in the roomier environs of Brampton's Sure Start centre.

"The ten participants in our first programme are regular users of our drop-in weight management programme, Bodybuster," Maddie told us just days before the first group. "Bodybuster is really successful but people sometimes plateau with their weight loss and lose motivation. We hope Shape-Up will help them along the way again."

### Calling all Healthy Living Centres

Weight Concern wishes the Chesterfield team all the best with their groups, and

hopes that this will be just the beginning of Shape-Up's foray into communities all over the UK. Islay HLC has already expressed interest in running Shape-Up groups and we would love to hear from others who would like to know more. Please contact Claire Willis for details (Tel: 0207 6791795).

### TRAINING DATES

Weight Concern runs Shape-Up facilitator training for anyone who is keen to start a weight loss group. Training takes place every two months and the next date is **28th July** this year. For more details, please visit our website (address below). We can also provide in-house training at a location of your choice,

## NEWS ROUND-UP

### SCHOOL NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS ANNOUNCED

The DfES has revealed new minimum nutrition standards for school food.

Foods which are high in salt, fat and sugar or contain low quality meat will be heavily restricted at lunchtimes, and there will be greater provision of fruit and vegetables, oily fish, bread and water.

These measures will be accompanied by an end to the sale of junk food in vending machines and tuck shops, and the School Food Trust is to work to promote sales of healthy snacks and drinks.

The government also pledged £220 million of investment to improve school meals, to be spent on training, extra hours and equipment for school cooks.

Weight Concern was delighted to hear of this positive governmental action on childhood obesity and hopes it will be strictly enforced and followed by similarly brave initiatives.

## NEWS ROUND-UP

### CHILDHOOD OBESITY EPIDEMIC ESCALATES IN ENGLAND

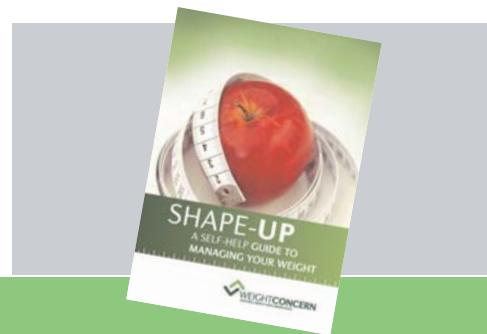
New data from the Health Survey for England suggest that nearly half of teenage (11-16 years old) girls and more than a third of teenage boys are overweight or obese. These figures represent a rise of 16% in girls, and 10% in boys since 1994.

Numbers were lower, but still worryingly high in 2-10 year olds, with just over a quarter of girls and just under a third of boys overweight or obese.

Weight Concern emphasised the role of research in combating these rocketing figures in a Times article on April 22nd: "In order to preserve the health of the next generation, there is desperate need for detailed research into what is triggering this rise", said Caroline Swain, "As well as practical action to encourage families to adopt healthier lifestyles."

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE Shape-Up shapes up for new audiences

The obesity epidemic is universal, leaving almost no sector of the population unscathed. But most weight loss advice is based on a healthy white population and assumes a certain income. This blanket approach may not be ideal because groups may differ in their pre-existing eating and activity patterns, and could face different barriers to weight loss. Weight Concern plans to tackle this issue head on with a number of projects designed to tackle weight loss in diverse groups.



## Shaping up for ... different cultures

After beating over 200 other applications in a battle for funding from the NPRI (National Prevention Research Initiative), Weight Concern has been awarded a project grant to team up with researchers at UCL to develop a weight loss programme specifically for Afro-Caribbean women in the UK.

"This population group has been neglected for too long," said Professor Andrew Steptoe, who will be co-supervising the project with Professor Jane Wardle. "Two thirds of Afro-Caribbean women are overweight or obese compared with around half in the general population. And this problem gets worse with age - over 90% of Afro-Caribbean women are overweight by 55".

### A lot to learn

The reasons behind this increased risk -which brings with it higher chances of heart disease and Type II diabetes - are unclear.

"What's particularly puzzling is that risk in Afro-Caribbean men is actually lower than average," comments new recruit Charlene Shoneye (p7), who will be leading the project.

"We need to ask if there are cultural factors that are unique to Afro-Caribbean women which need to be addressed to help them lose weight. I'm sure that a programme tailored to their needs will be very well received."



Food for thought: diet and weight issues vary with culture

### Making plans

The project will have several stages. In the first stage, focus groups and interviews will be used to explore beliefs and values among Afro-Caribbeans, including what they see as barriers and facilitators to weight loss, and what would they think would help them to lose weight.

This information will then be used to develop a weight loss tool taking these factors into account. Shape-Up programme will provide the starting point.

### Net benefits

However, there will also be one other major difference from the tried and tested Shape-Up format - the intervention will be provided and evaluated on the web.

"There is a lot of excitement in the research community about the possibilities created by the internet," commented Professor Steptoe.

"This is because it's an excellent way of reaching large numbers of participants. More and more people have online access at home, and nearly everyone with a desk job uses the web several times a day. This makes it a great way to deliver an intervention, as progress can be tracked and new information sent easily."

The research team will use a combination of email and the internet to deliver the intervention and to monitor weight change, and changes in diet, physical activity and quality of life. Finally, users will be interviewed about their experiences with our modified 'Shape-Up', and we will use their ideas to improve the intervention. Weight Concern is delighted that this important and exciting project is now underway.

## Shaping up for ... patient groups

Losing weight is beneficial for everyone who is obese or overweight. But it may be especially helpful for certain patient groups.

### PCOS and weight

Polycystic ovary syndrome, also known as PCOS, is one of the most common causes of infertility in women of child-bearing age. Women with PCOS are prone to dramatic weight gain which affects reproductive functioning and increases the chances that they will develop diabetes and heart disease.

Because of the condition many obese women with PCOS will never attain a BMI below 30. But a modest weight loss of just 6kg will often dramatically improve fertility and pregnancy rates in women without resorting to expensive fertility drugs.

This degree of weight loss is hard to achieve, but much more likely to occur in the context of a good lifestyle modification programme.

And adopting a healthy lifestyle can confer benefits on its own - symptoms are often reduced in women who do not lose weight but improve their eating and activity patterns.

### A tailored approach

In collaboration with the Gynaecology clinic at the Royal Free Hospital, Dr Paul Chadwick (Clinical Psychologist) has initiated a specialist Shape-Up group for PCOS.

"The philosophy of Shape-Up is ideal for overweight and obese women with PCOS," explains Dr Chadwick. "The emphasis on healthy eating at any weight seems to



Claire Willis



Dr Claire Hill

motivate women to look after their health. With other programmes, many become despondent because of the repeated failure to achieve unrealistic weight goals."

Dr Chadwick believes that working with the PCOS group has also had significantly benefited Shape-Up itself.

"We have really enjoyed this opportunity to develop the Shape-Up model by incorporating additional dietary and activity elements.

"For example, we educate participants about low GI (glycaemic index) diets and we include a walking programme. Both of these elements have been proven to be particularly effective for women with PCOS."

### Off to a good start

Initial feedback suggests that patients and professionals alike are enjoying and benefiting from the programme. Claire Willis (Weight Concern trainee Health Psychologist) is coordinating the groups with help from Dr Claire Hill (Weight Concern volunteer).

"This is the first time that Shape-Up has been targeted at a specific group of patients," said Claire Willis.

"If this trial works well we will go on to adapt the programme for other populations, such as individuals with Type II diabetes, and people recovering from cardiac disease."

## RESEARCH ROUND-UP

### PUPPY FAT IS A MYTH

Children who are fat when they enter adolescence are likely to be fat when they leave it, finds a large study conducted by researchers at UCL's Health Behaviour Unit.

Nearly 6,000 11-12 year olds from 36 London schools participated in the study, in which height, weight and waist measurements were taken every year for five years.

The initial prevalence of overweight and obesity was high - nearly a quarter of children when they were age 11-12. Average waist circumferences were also high - 67cm for girls and 68 cm for boys.

Most importantly, there was no indication that overweight children 'grew out' of their weight over time. Only a handful of students (7.6%) moved from overweight/ obese to normal weight status by age 15-16. The others either maintained their weight, or became heavier.

"Obesity that develops before 11 in childhood is persistent obesity rather than a temporary stage children are going through," said Professor Jane Wardle, lead author of the study and co-founder of Weight Concern.

"Parents have to take action earlier. And, as a society, we have to recognize that what's going on with the children is a future time bomb and not just a passing phenomenon."

Source: Development of adiposity in adolescence: five year longitudinal study of an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse sample of young people in Britain. Wardle J, Henning-Broderson N, Cole TJ, Jarvis MJ, Boniface DR. British Medical Journal, 2006;332:1130-14

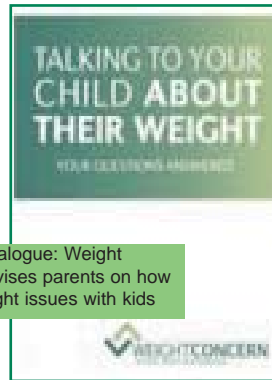
## FIGHTING CHILDHOOD OBESITY WITH KNOWLEDGE Booklet for concerned parents

The vast majority of parents want nothing more than for their children to be healthy and happy. As a result, most are willing to discuss any issue which might impact their health. But this doesn't necessarily apply when that issue is overweight or obesity.

"Most overweight children are not able to lose weight without adult support," comments Helen Croker, Research Dietitian for Weight

Concern. "But parents may be uneasy about bringing up the subject of weight with their child. This is because they fear that doing so will hurt their child's feelings, damage their self-esteem or make food and eating 'a big issue'."

Starting a dialogue: Weight Concern advises parents on how to raise weight issues with kids



### A talking cure

To help parents tackle this thorny problem, Weight Concern has produced an information leaflet, 'Talking to children about weight', which can be downloaded for free from our website.

The booklet recommends avoiding a 'big talk'. Instead parents should take the chance to talk about weight when suitable

opportunities arise, such as while shopping for clothes.

They should also consider the age of their child - very young children may not benefit from discussion of weight, but adolescents may find it more useful.

Other dos and don'ts include:

\* **Don't** scare your child into trying to lose weight. **Do** ask them about what would be good about being less heavy.

\* **Don't** tell your child that they are 'greedy' or 'lazy'. **Do** tell them you recognise how hard it is to make healthy choices at times.

\* **Don't** make your child feel guilty about their eating habits. **Do** praise them lavishly when you see them eating healthily.

Helen Croker hopes that the booklet will arm worried parents with a range of helpful ways of

talking to children about weight. "It really is important to start a dialogue with your child if they are adolescent and severely overweight. This booklet is designed to give parents more confidence about how to express their concerns in a supportive way."

## RESEARCH ROUND-UP

### RESULTS FROM BBC DIET TRIALS RELEASED

Last year BBC1 teamed up with researchers to test the success of four commercial weight loss programmes - the Atkins diet, the Slim-Fast plan, Weight Watchers pure points, and Rosemary Conley's eat yourself slim plan.

300 adults were randomly allocated to follow one of the diets for 6 months, and researchers measured changes in weight and body fat.

Results now released show that all diets had some level of success. On average, participants lost 5.9kg of weight, of which 4.4kg was fat. Men lost more than women, but this was

largely due to their higher initial weights. The Atkins diet produced the most rapid weight loss - but this evened out at the end of the trial.

"We were really interested to see these results," commented Weight Concern's Caroline Swain. "There is generally a distinct lack of research on programmes being used out there in the real world. We will soon be able to add to this debate ourselves, using data from our Big Panel."

Source: Randomised controlled trial of four commercial weight loss programmes in the UK: initial findings from the BBC "diet trials". Truby H, Baic S, deLooy A, Fox KR, Livingstone BE, Logan CM, Macdonald IA, Morgan LM, Millward DJ. British Medical Journal, 2006;332:1309-14

**Get in touch!** Please let us know your views on this newsletter or any aspect of Weight Concern's work. Contact details are at the bottom of each page.

# WEIGHING IN: Weight Concern advises NICE, DfES & DH

Britain is currently witnessing an unprecedented degree of governmental action to tackle obesity.

This enthusiasm is welcome, and long overdue. But we believe it is vital that policy should be evidence-based, and that the government should take advice from NGOs like Weight Concern, who have ready access to experts and professionals working at the grass roots.

## Paving the care pathway

So we were very pleased when the Department of Health (DH) asked us to produce GP guidelines on discussing weight with patients.

The charity played a central role in developing the 'Raising the issue' section of the government document, 'Care pathway for the management of overweight and obesity'. And GPs across the country will soon benefit from the charity's advice - all 42,000 GPs now practising in the UK will have access to the care pathway document.

"Doctors are increasingly aware of the serious health problems relating to being overweight, but some find it difficult to broach the topic with patients," explains Caroline Swain.

"The guidelines we have helped the DH to develop provide relevant, concise information to help doctors know what to suggest and how to express it. We hope they will encourage many more GPs to address obesity in primary care."

## NICE to help out

We were also glad to be invited to comment on the new National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines for the clinical management and prevention of obesity.

The charity made several key recommendations. Most importantly, we called for the inclusion of evidence grading, which we believe will be essential to help health professionals interpret the

guidelines. NICE thanked Weight Concern for our "constructive suggestions". We hope these will be taken on board.



## Beyond lunch-time

Perhaps the most well-publicised aspects of the government's obesity strategy have been plans to improve school food.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) recently consulted Weight Concern, along with a range of other bodies, on creating guidelines for school meals and food other than lunch.

In response, the charity strongly endorsed restricting confectionery in schools, offering price reductions on low-fat snack foods, and increasing the provision of a variety of fruits and vegetables.

We also took a strong stance on child education and involvement, recommending that children should be taught about the nutritional benefits of healthy snacks and consulted over decisions made about school food.

School meal standards will come into force in September this year and standards for other food will become law in 2007.



## NEWS ROUND-UP

### OFCOM JUNK FOOD ADVERT RESTRICTIONS CONDEMNED

Ofcom guidelines to regulate junk food ads for children were announced at the end of March to an unenthusiastic reception.

The media regulator plans to ban celebrities and film or TV characters from taking part in any food or drink commercial targeted at under 10s.

But it ruled out a pre-watershed ban on junk food advertising, saying this would cost broadcasters over £140m in lost revenue.

Weight Concern joined a range of organisations in voicing strong objections to the proposal, which many accuse of prioritising industry concerns over children's health.

"We believe that it is essential to take a differentiated approach to advertising restrictions," stressed charity director Caroline Swain. "Of course we need to protect children from the marketing of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods. But we also need to promote consumption of healthy foods such as fruit and vegetables. An 'all food advertising' ban would miss vital opportunities."

The charity also expressed concern that all three options mooted by Ofcom focus on children of 9 and under. "These proposals don't go far enough to protect older children and young teenagers from junk food advertising," added Caroline. "This is an enormous oversight, considering the huge increases in obesity in this group."

Weight Concern fully supports the push for a pre-watershed ban, and hopes that Ofcom will give their guidelines a radical overhaul.

## RESEARCH ROUND-UP

### HEALTHIER HAVING IT ALL?

Women who juggle the demands of working and family life are leaner than those who don't, researchers at UCL have found.

Over 1000 British women born in 1946 participated in the study, in

which long term homemakers came off worst.

They were larger than other women at age 26, and also put on more weight by middle age. In contrast, obesity affected far fewer women with multiple roles - married mothers

with strong ties to the labour market.

"These findings demonstrate how lifestyles influence weight gain over a lifetime," commented Weight Concern's Caroline Swain, in an article in The Times in May.

Source: A life-threatening complication of the Atkins diet. Chen T-Y, Dmitch W, Rosenstock JL, Lessnau K-D. The Lancet, 2006;367:958

### So what made you interested in taking this role at Weight Concern?

I've been working with obese patients and campaigning at a national level for some years now. Having left the NOF, I wanted to continue working in the field, but with an organisation which places equal importance on prevention and treatment.

Weight Concern prides itself on scrutinising available research and basing policies only on that research, and I thoroughly support that strong grounding on scientific principles. I also like and respect Jane Wardle [Weight Concern's scientific adviser and co-founder] a lot!

### What would you like to see from Weight Concern over the next 5-10 years?

I think Weight Concern should strive towards becoming the focal point for reliable and credible information on all aspects of obesity - for the public, for policy makers, and for the media.

The team of experts it has assembled gives it a broad and balanced view, and puts the charity in a great position to take that expert advice and make it into something pragmatic and tangible that people can use. To quote the strapline, Weight Concern should continue to 'fight obesity with knowledge'!

### What are you most proud of achieving in your career to date?

I founded the NOF to raise public awareness of obesity as a serious medical issue with implications for both children and adults, and one that desperately needs treatment and prevention.

It's only 5 or 6 years since I can vividly recall being laughed at by NHS personnel who couldn't believe that I wanted obesity to be regarded as a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease and Type II diabetes.

If in my five years with the NOF I played a small part in making obesity the topical issue it is now, I would be very happy.

### As a GP, how do you begin to 'raise the issue' with adult patients who are overweight?

One of the advantages of General Practice is that you tend to know your patients over a long period of time. That means you can choose your words and your moment carefully, and there's an element of trust there - if you say there's a problem with their weight, they'll take it seriously.

The first thing I try and work out is whether they agree with me or not, and if they agree, are they prepared to do something about it. If they're not that's fine: it's their choice and I wouldn't change how I deal with them after. But if they want to do something I offer my support.

## Engaging with the Experts

**Dr Ian Campbell is a full-time GP and prominent campaigner for the prevention and treatment of obesity. After five years chairing the National Obesity Forum, a charity which he founded in 2000, he joined Weight Concern in April as Honorary Medical Director.**

**We asked Dr Campbell for his insights on obesity as a medical condition, and his views on the influence of the media.**



Dr Ian Campbell

### What kind of support do you offer to patients?

I think a lot can be achieved by raising an individual's awareness about their weight and giving them pointers about where to get help.

Help may come through a commercial weight loss group, through coming to see the practice nurse, even through the Shape-Up programme! Dieticians are another great resource but unfortunately there are only a few available and so the time they can spend with patients is limited.

Whichever method they choose, they know that I'm there to support them. This might mean seeing them throughout, or sometimes intermittently. Together we would look at all aspects of weight management - dietetics, physical activity and psychological issues. We use pharmacotherapy in some patients, and as a last resort we'll put patients forward for bariatric surgery.

### What tips would you give health professionals who have to deal with patients who are overweight?

Always be positive. Always be there. Never

be dismissive. Convey an encouraging attitude at all times, even when you don't feel like it.

Allow the patient to feel that they're always in control - they make the decisions. I think our job is to make them aware of what options there are and let them pick for themselves. Patients should set their own goals, and you should work with them to achieve those goals.

One of the most frustrating things is seeing patients who are on a bit of a high in the first 6 weeks, but then lose enthusiasm and give up as the weight loss tails off. It's far better to make sure that although they have short-term goals, they also know what their long-term objectives are.

And the other thing I would say is: think very carefully before dismissing any approach to weight management. The best programme is the one the patient wants to do. Keeping my patients on-side and working with them towards making healthier lifestyle choices is key.

### When you see children who are overweight, how do you raise the subject with parents?

It's very difficult to raise the subject for children. I've known young girls who have been reduced to tears by health professionals because they've taken comments the wrong way.

My approach is to list a whole range of possible factors that could influence a disease process, of which weight might be one. Then I would focus very much on the parent supporting the child to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Most importantly I virtually never talk directly about weight. Instead I would focus on healthy diet, physical fitness and activity, and the child's self-esteem.

### How responsible are individuals for their weight problems? And how responsible are parents for weight problems in children?

I think individuals are absolutely responsible - health has to start at home and personal responsibility is absolutely key. But there are an enormous number of powerful societal influences that lead us into individual choices. People need support and direction on how to change their lifestyle habits, and above all else they need understanding, not criticism.

The same applies to parents of overweight children - parents have to lead by example. But if children are vulnerable to societal influence, then so are parents, and they may therefore need a lot of support from those of us who are in the position to offer it.

### There are now a huge number of TV programmes about weight loss. Are they a help or a hindrance?

## FRESH FACES

Weight Concern is pleased to introduce several more new faces. First we extend a big welcome to **Charlene Shoneye**.

She comes to us fresh from an MSc in Nutrition and Dietetics at London Metropolitan University, and brings with her specialist knowledge about ethnic differences in diet. She will be predominantly working with Weight Concern to develop a modified version of



Charlene Shoneye

Shape-Up for use in Afro-Caribbean women (see article, p3).

We are also happy to announce two new appointments to our board of trustees.

**Professor Wendy Atkin** is chair of the Cancer Research UK Colorectal Cancer Unit at St Mark's Hospital and Professor of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy at Imperial College London. She is well known for her pioneering work on colorectal cancer



Wendy Atkin

prevention.

Last but not least, **Helen Croker** is a research dietician in the Health Behaviour Unit at UCL, where she helps to run childhood obesity treatment groups. Helen was instrumental in the birth of the charity and will be the first obesity specialist on our board of trustees. We look forward to working with everyone.



Helen Croker

### Engaging with the Experts (cont. from p6)

I actually think the media has played a very significant part in raising public awareness of obesity as a serious issue, and in improving the debate overall. Certainly the proportion of voyeuristic articles has sharply decreased.

But there's one inescapable fact - TV is about entertainment first and education second. So any programme on obesity has first to capture the audience's attention - I think health professionals sometimes struggle with that fact! The media certainly has an essential role to play, along with industry, government, education and the health professions.

### Finally, how do you manage to balance your time working as a GP with all your other commitments?

The truth is I don't - it's all very imbalanced! But I'm supported by a hugely tolerant and encouraging team in my practice, and I'm prepared to put in all the extra hours for something I believe in. I think this is a very important area that clearly needs work, and I've had a role to play in that that I've been more than happy to fill.

## RESEARCH ROUND-UP

### CHEAP Pedometers OVERESTIMATE EXERCISE

Nearly three quarters of inexpensive pedometers tested by volunteers gave inaccurate step counts, finds a new study from the University of Ghent.

35 healthy adults helped to test nearly 1000 'Stepping Meter' pedometers by wearing them at the same time as the 'Yamax Digiwalker' pedometer - an instrument with proven accuracy and reliability.

A total of 74.1% of the Stepping Meters either over- or under-estimated the number of steps taken. Over-estimation was by far the most common; participants said the gadget could be triggered by merely sitting on a chair or bending over.

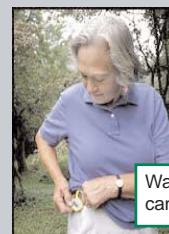
"I can't say I'm surprised that these pedometers gave such a poor performance," said Weight Concern's

Helen Croker, who uses more pricey versions in treatment for childhood obesity. "We certainly wouldn't use them for research. But that isn't to say that inexpensive pedometers can't have their uses.

"We challenge our children to compete against each other to do the highest number of steps per week, and to beat the number of steps they managed the week before. They all find it terrifically motivating - although I'm sure a certain amount of cheating goes on!

"Cheaper pedometers might be a very useful, affordable way for people who are less well-off to motivate themselves and their kids to exercise."

Weight Concern supports calls from the study's authors for a quality kite mark system to help researchers and individual users decide which pedometers to buy.



Watching your step: pedometers can inspire us to exercise

## NEWS ROUND-UP

### NEW OBESITY DRUG LAUNCHED

A new obesity drug has been launched in Britain. Rimonabant, which will have the trade name Accomplia, acts by blocking the brain's endocannabinoid system, which regulates hunger.

Beneficial effects on weight and a range of cardiovascular risk factors, including cholesterol levels and insulin resistance, have now been reported in several major trials. Evidence from one trial also suggests that rimonabant may suppress

nicotine cravings, thus aiding smoking cessation. Side effects with low doses are said to be minimal, e.g. mild nausea.

Weight Concern welcomes this new option for treatment of the severely overweight - but hopes that it will be treated as an adjunct to healthy lifestyle changes rather than a magic bullet for obesity.

Rimonabant is unlikely to be widely available on the NHS until NICE guidelines are issued. It is only recommended for those with a BMI over 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or over 27kg/m<sup>2</sup> with serious risk factors.

**Support us!** Weight Concern has limited sources of regular income and warmly welcomes donations, however small. If you would like to donate, please send cheques, payable to Weight Concern, to the address below.

**A final word...** We would like to extend our thanks to all those who support Weight Concern's work.