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Nutritional and Weight Status of Job Corps Students

Background: The prevalence of overweight among adolescents is growing at an alarming rate. In the NHANES III (National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 1988-1994), it was reported that 10.5% of 12-19 year olds were overweight. Preliminary reports of the latest NHANES (1999-2000) show that 15.5% of this age group are now overweight. Overweight children are at risk for becoming overweight adults, which put them at risk for health problems, such as cardiovascular disease, glucose intolerance, hypertension, dyslipidemia, hyperandrogenism, cancer, and psychological problems. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Grafton Job Corps may have higher rates of overweight than the general population.

Objective: To assess the weight and nutritional status of Job Corps students.

Methods: Setting: Grafton, MA Job Corps, a federal vocational training program for 16-24 year olds. Prospective study: 92 entering students were enrolled into the study between 1/14/04 and 3/24/04 after obtaining written consent. A fourth year medical student administered a brief multiple choice survey, and then measured heights, weights, and blood pressures, and examined the nape of the neck for acanthosis nigricans. Retrospective study: 297 currently active students who entered the Job Corps prior to 1/14/04 were enrolled. Charts were reviewed for age, height, weight, blood pressure, and ethnicity. A BMI was calculated for all participants.

Results: The prevalence of overweight (BMI 25-30) was 19% and the prevalence of obesity (BMI>30) was 26%. The prevalence of both overweight and obesity was 45%. Overweight/obesity was significantly higher in women (mean BMI=28.1) than men (mean BMI=25.5).

Conclusions: Although there is no published national data on the prevalence of overweight/obesity in 16-24 year olds, the rates at the Grafton Job Corps seem to be significantly higher than the national rates in 12-19 year olds. This indicates a need to develop an intervention to help reduce the weight of Grafton Job Corps students.