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# Commercial weight loss services more effective than primary care

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Commercial weight management programmes are more successful and cost less than those offered by primary care facilities such as GP surgeries and pharmacies, according to research from the University of Birmingham published on online by the British Medical Journal today (November 4).

The Lighten Up study led by Dr Kate Jolly, senior lecturer in Public Health and Epidemiology in the School of Health and Population Sciences, assessed the effectiveness of a variety of weight management programmes, including commercial regimes, primary care services and a control group. Outcomes were assessed at three and 12 months.

Funded by NHS South Birmingham the randomised controlled trial took place between January and May 2009 and involved 740 patients aged 18 and over who were registered with general practices in South Birmingham and who had a raised body mass index recorded within the last 15 months.

All of the programmes achieved weight reduction after 12 weeks but at 12 months significant weight loss was seen in all of the groups aside from the one-to-one general practice and pharmacy programmes. The Weight Watchers group was the only one to demonstrate greater weight loss than the control. The primary care programmes were also the most costly to provide.

*'Our study shows that 12-week weight management courses are effective in producing clinically significant weight loss in a proportion of their clients,'* the researchers reported. *'Almost one third of people allocated to the Weight Watchers group achieved a clinically important five per cent reduction in body weight at one-year follow-up. This level of weight loss has been shown to reduce the risk of progression to diabetes.'*

Dr Jolly comments: *'GPs should consider referring patients to commercial slimming groups rather than providing support in the practice'*

For more information or to interview Dr Kate Jolly please contact Jenni Ameghino, Press Office, University of Birmingham. Tel: 0121 415 8134. Mobile 07768 924156.

## Notes to editors

• Almost 25 per cent of the population of England is now classed as obese, while the World Health Organisation has described the rise in obesity worldwide as a 'global epidemic'.

• Dr Kate Jolly is available for interview. Please contact the press office to arrange.

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