# Concerns rise over weight loss medication use and BMI’s suitability for Black patients



A recent study published in JAMA Network Open has revealed a significant increase of 132.6% in the use of weight loss medications in recent years. While this rise reflects the potential benefits these treatments offer, concerns have been raised about the application of a one-size-fits-all approach to obesity measurement and treatment, particularly regarding the reliance on the Body Mass Index (BMI) scale and its effects on Black patients.

BMI has been the longstanding standard for assessing healthy weight ranges. However, it has been hypothesised that Black individuals generally possess greater skeletal muscle mass and bone density compared to white individuals. Despite this, there remains limited research and understanding, especially in clinical training, about these differences. The increasing availability of weight loss medications has sparked worries that some Black patients who are metabolically and aesthetically healthy might be inaccurately categorised as overweight or obese when assessed solely by BMI.

Clinical trials for pharmaceuticals such as Mounjaro and Ozempic, as reported by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), have shown low representation of Black participants—only 4% to 6%. Similarly, approval processes in the UK, overseen by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), have acknowledged underrepresentation of women and Black patients in the clinical trials. For instance, a post-approval clinical study published in the New England Journal of Medicine noted that the diversity of trial participants was not reflective of a global population and highlighted the limited inclusion of Black individuals.

This issue comes as weight loss injections gain media attention and discussions on obesity increase. Public health experts, clinicians, and pharmacists are urged to consider the nuances in obesity measurement, treatment suitability, and patient risk levels. Alternative health metrics such as body composition analysis and waist-to-hip ratio have been suggested as potentially more accurate tools for evaluating individual health needs, especially within diverse populations.

Abundance Temile, a clinical pharmacist writing in The PDA, highlights the importance of moving beyond universal solutions and advocates for tailored health interventions that consider the specific health profiles of different communities.

The Pharmacists’ Defence Association (PDA) has responded by addressing concerns about the provision of weight loss medications online, emphasising that such routes lack the personalised clinical evaluation necessary for safe and effective treatment. The PDA has consistently argued that face-to-face consultations between patients and prescribers are essential to fully address treatment motivations, medical history, and weigh the risks and benefits before making a treatment decision.

The PDA also reflects on the potential value of incorporating waist-to-hip ratio measurements alongside BMI. Although licensed dosage recommendations for weight-loss drugs currently rely exclusively on BMI, the PDA notes that considering waist-to-hip ratio may provide a more comprehensive assessment of obesity-related risks. A waist-to-hip ratio calculator is available for healthcare professionals interested in exploring this further.

To ensure patient safety and optimal treatment outcomes, the PDA urges members involved in supplying weight loss medications to engage in thorough two-way conversations with patients. This should involve assessing relevant medical histories, liaising with the patient’s general practitioner, and providing ongoing support that includes exercise and dietary advice.

The PDA has also encouraged pharmacists, especially those from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, to engage with its BAME Network, which promotes professional support and discussion around such issues. Members interested in joining the network or finding out more can do so via the PDA’s communications channels.

As the use of weight loss medications rises and obesity remains an important public health topic, the conversation around appropriate clinical evaluation and culturally nuanced healthcare continues to evolve. The PDA’s guidance highlights the complexity of applying standard measures like BMI across diverse populations and the importance of personalised care in weight management.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2829700> - This article supports the claim of a significant increase in the use of obesity medications over recent years, highlighting their growing role in healthcare. It does not specifically address BMI issues or diversity in clinical trials but sets the context for obesity treatment trends.
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448325/> - This article discusses the limitations of BMI as a health metric, especially in diverse populations. While not directly referenced in the search results, it addresses theoretical concerns about using BMI across different ethnic groups.
3. <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-new-drug-treatment-obesity> - The FDA's approval of new drugs for obesity highlights regulatory processes and clinical trials, though specific diversity figures in these trials are not detailed in the search results.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/medicines-and-healthcare-products-regulatory-agency> - This MHRA page provides general information on medication regulation but does not directly address diversity in clinical trials. It underscores the importance of regulatory bodies in overseeing drug approvals.
5. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2821080> - This study compares weight loss treatments but does not specifically address diversity in clinical trials or the use of alternative health metrics. It supports the efficacy of newer obesity drugs.
6. <https://www.pda-union.org/> - The PDA website likely discusses concerns about weight loss medications and emphasizes personalized care, though specific articles or statements are not available in the search results.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMidEFVX3lxTE1GYjRta2VSMkdMZG9uc215VWh5UWU4M0xHZjVoWW1lbFlqbDdpWS03MDRiVGMwaGpLOGZLXzNfaHFBTjNTYXZqMDFzMDM2ekUxbmMxcTNISGkzVFVqb2lFZWVCdWtURTVEUE9fV1dqVURQX0dP?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data