

Investigating participant diversity in weight management clinical trials

Abstract

Background

Over the past decade, the prevalence of obesity amongst adults in the US continues to rise. Minority groups are disproportionately affected, and non-Hispanic Black adults and women have a significantly higher prevalence of severe obesity. Participants in weight management studies are most often majority women. Lack of diversity of participants by sex and race/ethnicity for weight management trials can impair generalizability of results to the general population.

Objectives

The aims of this project were to 1) evaluate existing data on minority recruitment in weight management trials, 2) review outreach and recruitment strategies employed for men and minorities pre-and post-pandemic for Project STAR, and 3) analyze prior strategies to evaluate themes and pre- vs post-pandemic findings especially with respect to the recruitment of men and minority participants.

Methods

A literature search was undertaken using PubMed, EMBASE, CINAHL, ERIC, and Web of Science. Previously employed recruitment strategies for Project STAR (pre-and post-pandemic) were evaluated for effectiveness on recruitment goals of underrepresented groups, and in the setting of a global pandemic.

Results

A total of 616 articles were identified in the literature search of which 17 were included. Women were the predominant sex in most articles and only 7 trials had at least 1/3 of participants from a diverse racial/ethnic background. Recruitment goals for Project STAR were realized in 2 of 3 cohorts. Cohort 2 failed to reach the minority recruitment goal due to pandemic shutdowns.

Conclusion

Weight management clinical trials lack in participant diversity by sex and race/ethnicity. Studies with higher levels of diverse participants were intentional in efforts to increase participant diversity. Future work in weight management trials should be focused on required reporting of participant race/ethnicity in published work and increasing the diversity of participants to expand the reach of study results.