

Care of the Oversize Patient

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Extent of the Problem: Some 127 million adults, over half the adult population, are now classified as overweight, with almost half of those considered obese, according to the American Obesity Association. Of the obese, nine million are classified as extremely obese. The oversize patient and visitors both need to be accommodated. Patient shape is as important as weight when determining individual accommodations. Actual weights may differ significantly from reported weights; scale accuracy may decrease as weight increases.

Areas for Consideration:

Accommodation for 800-1000 lbs may be warranted for some items

Staff Competencies

- Be aware of inadvertently putting the patient in unsafe situations. The American Institute of Architects recommends five feet surround the bed and any care area to accommodate extra people (in confined space).
- Safe resuscitation techniques for oversize patients, including equipment and physical management
- Understanding of limits of equipment (including flooring), test modalities
- Need to plan for extrication, dealing with broken equipment.

Environment of Care

- Shower – prefer area sufficient for two attendants with patient, sturdy shower chair
- Toilet – floor-mounted; may use “over-toilet chair” to accommodate large patients
- Sinks/countertops structurally sufficient to resist pulling away from the wall if grabbed by a falling patient
- OR/procedure tables – consider 1000-lb capacity
- Diagnostic imaging – CT/MRI scanner tables may not accommodate oversize patient, may have to forego some testing or find community resource such as “open MRI,” if available

Equipment/Supplies

- Blood pressure cuffs for oversize patients
- Lift equipment; some should be mobile to go to fallen patient throughout facility
- Beds that convert to chair-style are convenient
- Walkers, wheelchairs, stretchers, commode seats, hover mats for transfers, overbed trapezes to accommodate
- Gowns, robes to accommodate

Cultural Sensitivity

- Potential losses: autonomy/control (e.g., patient not be able to reach things), dignity, comfort, safety
- Hypersensitivity to ambient temperatures

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Public Spaces

- Elevators – door capacity
- Waiting chairs – prefer 10% of them appropriate to accommodate large patients – loveseats, no-arm chairs
- Units designated for oversize patients should be close to parking
- Doorways – allow oversize patient and visitor easy access
- When you care for oversize patients you are likely to have large family members, so accommodate them also.

Summary of necessary Items

- Adequate wheelchairs, stretchers and beds – get the largest;
- Appropriately-sized BP cuffs
- Large gowns
- Private, floor-mounted commodes
- Appropriate waiting room seating.
- **Nice, but optional:** private bathrooms with five-foot clearance and large showers without a lip on floor, to allow wheelchair entry.

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