



## 6th International Conference on Clinical Ethics Consultation

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[www.ethics2010.org](http://www.ethics2010.org)



### Abstract Submission Form – Panels

Please contact John Tuohey at [ethics@providence.org](mailto:ethics@providence.org) with any questions.

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Additional panelists, if any (up to three):

Name: Soren Holm???

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Degree: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Degree: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed Session Title: Interfere or not? Cultural differences regarding obesity in small children.

Describe topic or case to be discussed up to 300 words:

The case I would like to present came forward while giving an ethics training as part of an obesity prevention programme for Youth Health Care Workers (YHCW) in the Netherlands:

(In the Netherlands more than 95 % of all newborn babies are being monitored in National Health Care Centres until they are preschoolers of 4 years old: length and weight are measured and kept in schedules; their cognitive and motor development are watched and they will receive the obligatory vaccinations.)

A 3-year-old Turkish boy (belonging to a cultural minority group) suffers from severe overweight. He has become so fat that he can no longer use the bathroom in the Child Day Care Centre. He comes for a regular check-up with his mother accompanied by his grandmother and an older aunt at the Youth Health Care Centre. The three women are proud of their chubby son and grandson. They tell the YHCW the boy receives two to three donuts for breakfast every day. The question: should the YHCW interfere by reporting this as child abuse?

#### Background:

Obesity is a growing problem in western countries. Despite increasing knowledge about the risks of unhealthy food and lack of exercise more and more people are overweight, including small children. Interestingly, cultural differences play a role with respect to obesity as well. Several studies show that within specific ethnic minorities the prevalence of overweight and obesity is higher. Apart from socioeconomic causes, different cultural views about nutrition, health and body weight also affect people's lifestyles and food patterns. It is known, for example, that overweight and fatness are sometimes viewed as signs of good health and wealth (fat is beautiful, heavy is healthy). In this view, overweight may be valued differently. With regard to the growing problem of overweight amongst small children, different views and ideals about child raising play a role as well: it may be considered good to over-nourish and indulge one's children

Describe briefly each proposed panelist's position to be offered (up to 300 words):

#### The case for interference:

It is the duty of a YHCW to watch over the health of the child she sees. In this case the boy suffers from extreme overweight, which endangers his health. He runs risks like heart and vascular disease, diabetes and orthopaedic problems. He already walks in a difficult way and cannot run. But not only his physical health is in danger; the YHCW should also take into account the psychological consequences of exclusion and social stigma. Fat children are frequently seen as being 'stupid' and 'lazy', and usually have fewer friends.

This boy is 3 years old; if we interfere now, we could change things for the better.

#### The case against interference:

It is the duty of a YHCW to respect the autonomy of the parents. In this case the mother is very proud of her chubby son. According to her cultural background she values overweight differently than most parents in the Netherlands. In her culture especially young boys have to be fat and round as a sign of

being taken good care of. Furthermore, the Turkish community is a very tight community; if it gets known that the YHCW has reported this case as child abuse, it probably will lead to a lot of Turkish parents avoiding the Youth Health Care Centre.

We should not interfere, because we have to respect this cultural difference and we do not want to violate parents' trust.

I deliberately described the most extreme positions for and against interference. I hope the debate will lead to an acceptable answer on the question how to act as YHCW when confronted with such a case.

Are you planning to or will you be willing to submit a poster along with your panel?

Yes     No