

Fat Patients Endure Humiliation, Misdiagnoses & Neglect

By Virgie Tovar

I'd been suffering from... nerve pain in the thoracic region of my vertebral column--the result of an injury... My doctor told me that my pain was the result of my being "morbidly obese," charged my insurance the maximum allowable for an office visit, and dismissed me with a referral to a nutritionist... I still live with nerve pain, every day, with some days being so bad that I contemplate killing myself to be free of it.

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“...he'd ask me questions like how could I let myself get so big and if my husband had issues with my weight.”

“I was prescribed phen phen in 7th grade... I lost so much weight so fast it was unhealthy, but he kept reassuring me I would be happy when I was able to start high school weighing less. I would eat so little I would black out when I stood up and my hair started falling out.”

“I have gotten treated like an unworthy animal by medical professionals. They would touch me a little as possible, disgust clearly written across their grimaces.”

“...she waited until she had her fingers uncomfortably jammed inside me before she really laid into me about my weight. I mean, my feet were in the stirrups and I was already wincing from discomfort, and she was recommending gastric bypass to me.”

“One time I had a pinched nerve in my back. Not knowing that was the issue I went to my doctor. She told me it was because I was overweight and that my back was hurting because my body was like a ‘bus on an office desk.’ I was 18.”

The accounts read like a horror story.

Fatphobia in medical environments can have life-threatening effects, and it's not as uncommon - or as well-meaning - as you may think. In preparing for a workshop on fat patient care for the upcoming Rebellious Nursing Conference in Philadelphia this week, I created a survey with only two questions, the first of which read:

(1) Please describe a negative or positive experience (that you felt correlated to your body size) you've had with a medical professional/practitioner.

The responses I received seemed unbelievable, and I found myself fighting feelings of disbelief and cognitive dissonance: doctors and nurses are people with whom we entrust our health, our bodies, our dignity, our lives. But the truth is that I, myself, have experienced some of the very medical discrimination they were describing. When asked why I am a fat activist, I respond: "because we are in an utter state of emergency." Recent findings from this survey confirmed this conviction.

I expected to receive approximately 15 responses. I received over 60. Many of the details are characterized by neglect, stifling bigotry and life-threatening misdiagnoses. Respondents reported experiencing humiliation, shame, and suicidal thoughts inspired by interactions with doctors and nurses. I found myself reading their stories until early in the morning, becoming increasingly angry - unsure exactly whom to blame: the practitioners who choose not to suspend their personal biases at the risk of their patients' health? The shockingly fatphobic culture in which these medical professionals are practicing?

I have chosen to publish every single response - every single story - that I received because it is so imperative that these stories are told, that we bear witness to these experiences, which are so staggering, which could so easily be our own, which *are* our own.

You can read these stories below. Following the stories is a compilation of responses to the second survey question, which solicited suggestions for nurses/doctors seeking to practice harm reduction with fat patients.

Q1: Please describe a negative or positive experience (that you felt correlated to your body size) you've had with a medical professional/practitioner.

1. I once asked a doctor if she had any ideas why my back hurt so badly years after a car accident. She humiliated me by saying that I was keeping myself fat to keep myself safe from male attention. Essentially that there was something wrong with me mentally that was causing me to be 'way, WAY overweight!'. This horrible lecture lasted several minutes, even after I started bawling and sobbing openly. I got so upset, it took all my self-control not to drive my car into an overpass on the way home.
2. After moving to a new town and presenting to a new psychiatrist to discuss suicidal ideation, I was interrupted mid sentence for him to inform me that there was nothing wrong with me and all I needed to do was lose weight. Upon trying to resume explanation of my 15 year history of Bipolar disorder and agoraphobia, as well as previous suicide attempts I was again interrupted and told he did not believe I had anything wrong with me that losing weight wouldn't cure. He then proceeded to ask me invasive questions about my anatomy and sex life related to my size. Through tears I asked if there was another psychiatrist at the practice I could see if he didn't want to treat me, and was told "I could bring it up with the board but they will all agree with me, you're just too fat". I left feeling humiliated and dehumanised. If it weren't for the family member in the waiting room I may have carried through my suicide plans upon leaving. Upon later reflection I should have reported him, however for years following I remained hu-

miliated by the experience and convinced it was somehow my fault. I remained unmedicated and avoidant of medical care for fear of going through the same experience with another doctor. I have only recently, with the help of a wonderful doctor been able to overcome that fear and am again receiving appropriate treatment.

3. I went to a doctor during the winter my junior year of college for a regular check-up. At this time, I was a size 18. My bloodwork came back well within normal ranges for everything, except my HDL was a little low. I wasn't experiencing any pain, and nothing about my body felt off. The doctor still recommended a 1000-calorie a day diabetic diet. I followed the diet to the letter when I went back to school. 6 weeks later, having cut out most of my nutrition (I wasn't allowed most of my normal fruit and veggies as snacks) and all bread products, I woke up one morning and began vomiting bile. I went to the emergency room, where the doctor I saw told me in no uncertain terms to stop the diet, because it was certainly better to be fat and alive than dead.
4. I was seeing a nurse practitioner for a couple years and had gained a lot of weight in that time. I was trying to lose it, exercising every day and on a 1000 calorie diet, but nothing worked. She did multiple full blood panels because she thought I might have hypothyroidism, but everything was completely normal. She tried to convince me that I had diabetes even though my fasting blood sugar was totally normal because "most obese people have diabetes." She also implied that I was lying about my diet and exercise habits, and that was the last straw. I found another doctor and showed him the test results - he said that the weight gain was most likely related to my antidepressants. He told me it's not common to gain that much weight, but that because I'm very sensitive to all medications (I get drowsy from non-drowsy meds, for example) it was most likely the case. He told me it was better to be fat and happy and healthy than to be thin and miserable and ill (especially with my history with ED in high school). He always treated me with the utmost respect, and even though I have since moved, he'll always set the standard for respectful care for me.

5. Getting a recommendation for gastric bypass when I went to a specialist about knee issues. I'm also not sure if I should be mad that the doctor wasn't willing to suggest/research alternatives if a patient won't fit in a standard MRI machine.
6. So many to choose from! The most shocking I've ever had was the doctor who told me, at 19 when I presented with persistent heavy menstrual flow (for 18 months solid) that was leaving me horrifically anaemic and doubled over in pain "Go and lose some weight, find yourself a boyfriend and come back to me when you want babies."
7. I've had several, but the most pertinent one was a few years ago. At the time, I was a size 8, hovering around 150 pounds at 5'5". I had recently spent the past year losing 50 pounds. I was also a vegetarian. When I went in for an annual checkup, my insulin, cholesterol, and triglyceride levels were high, which didn't match my diet and exercise regime (I exercised at least 4 times per week). Instead of looking into the problem further, my doctor simply told me "to stop eating so much meat and work out more," even though I didn't eat meat and worked out a great deal! A few years later, one doctor put all of the "clues" together to discover that the reason for my abnormal lab results was Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) and an extremely elevated level of DHEA-S in my system. The first doctor simply refused to believe me because (a) I still wasn't within BMI standards of "health" and (b) I had been fat before.
8. I've had several negative experiences in which doctors ignored my medical concerns and dismissed it by saying that it would be resolved by my losing weight. This has been the case with back pain, restless legs, knee pain, and foot pain, all of which I had when I was thin as well. These problems did not manifest when I was heavy. I don't disagree that weight loss MAY help, but they assumed that the problem was directly caused by my weight, and did not listen when I tried to tell them otherwise.
9. Basically every time I would go to the doctor it would become about my weight. Peritonsillar abscess? Week long in patient care, last piece of advice: Lose weight! Back hurts? Lose weight and get a breast reduction! Frozen shoulder? Lose

weight! Depressed? Lose weight! Social anxiety? Lose weight! I wish I was exaggerating. Multiple times I would have to tell me doctor something along the lines of "OK, I'm working on that. What can you tell me for the meantime?" or "OK, now that you got that out of your system, tell me what you would tell a thin person." The cold hard fact of the matter, though, is that now I just don't go to the doctor. I know I need to but I don't because I know what they're going to tell me as if I don't know my weight is an issue. I have social anxiety, GAD, and depression and I won't get myself to go to a doctor because I can't handle how cruel I am treated when I do. Looks like doctor's concern trolling hasn't helped anyone. I'm still overweight, I still have issues I need help with, but now I won't see a doctor at all.

10. I have had so many negative experiences with doctors and healthcare professionals regarding my size that I avoid going to the doctor at all now. I suffer through infections and other illnesses alone and without help because I have been made to feel so ashamed, embarrassed, guilty, ignored, etc. at the hands of people entrusted to help me. At my last office visit, (the first in a long time,) I explained that I'd been suffering from a long list of maladies, the worst of which being nerve pain in the thoracic region of my vertebral column--the result of an injury I sustained many years ago, long before I gained weight. My doctor told me that my pain was the result of my being "morbidly obese", charged my insurance the maximum allowable for an office visit, and dismissed me with a referral to a nutritionist. I went home and just cried. I still live with nerve pain, every day, with some days being so bad that I contemplate killing myself to be free of it. To doctors, I am simply a fat person and my illnesses and medical problems are automatically assumed to be a result of my fat-ness. I sometimes think I should bring photos of myself from a few years ago into the doctor to shove in their faces and say, "DO YOU SEE THIS?! This was me AFTER I started having pain, NOT BEFORE! I am fat because I am in agony, I hurt, I can't move, I can't swim, I can't work out, I can't even stand at my kitchen sink and do dishes. I am not in pain because I am fat. I am fat because I am in PAIN. NOW HELP ME, DAMNIT!"

11. I stopped going to my doctor for routine checkups and procedures because every single time I went, I would get a 15-20 minute lecture about how I needed to change my diet and exercise to lose weight. This lecture was always unsolicited, and based entirely on assumptions about my activity and dietary habits - the doctor never actually asked me about my habits. I would leave each appointment feeling terrible and demoralized. Most appointments were for completely unrelated issues - some to get PPD results for job clearance, some for renewal of contraceptive prescriptions, at least one for bronchitis. I never asked for medical advice about my weight, because I didn't want it.
12. I was told that I didn't have severe asthma, I was just fat and needed to exercise more. I had to asphyxiate and lose consciousness while running at school, be admitted to the hospital and pumped full of drugs to be taken seriously. I was 15 years old and 30lbs overweight.
13. I went to a doctor in order to get immunization titers done so I could transfer to a school across the country. I specified repeatedly that I was there just for the titers. The doctor stepped up to me, got less than 6 inches from my face and pointed to my chart "You weigh too much. We have to do something about this. You have to lose weight by any means necessary." This woman had never met me and only knew my weight height and blood pressure. She didn't know of my long history of life threatening mental illness and depression, self injury or eating disorders. She didn't ask. She only cared that I weighed 275lbs. She also told me I have to start eating healthier, that I can't just eat fast food all the time. Without asking me a single question about my eating habits. When I pointed this out and said "you are making an assumption that I eat fast food because I'm fat" she crossed her arms, leaned against the counter and very defensively said "No! No I am not. It is not an assumption". She then sat at her computer without another word to me and started entering this in, not telling me what. Her last comment to me was "you know you can't just sit in your room all day when you are in college. You have to get up once in awhile". I have been in college for 4 years. Again, she was making assumptions rather than asking me about my health history and lifestyle. When I went to the lab to get my titers done (I have no insurance and

was paying out of pocket) I found out she not only cancelled the lab order for my titers but put in to have my cholesterol, blood sugar and thyroid tested. Tests I did not ask for and could not pay. I was forced to go to another doctor and have them write the lab order so I could attend school, costing me hundreds of dollars more that I could not afford.

14. negative: my eye doctor wouldn't believe that my vision has gotten so bad and refused to give me new glasses unless i was checked for diabetis. i suppose he thought that because of my weight i must have had diabetis and that that would be the reason why my vision had gotten so bad.
15. Ive often had professionals not listen to me when I am sick, Even in cases that do not correlate to my size at all. Once I caught scabies on a study abroad trip and was told that if I stopped thinking about itching it would go away; it took 4 months to get an effective medication! I was recommended to pass a 13mm kidney stone (Im female) causing a urologist to have to preform emergency surgery a month later. I have gone in for cold medication only to have a practitioner tell me that I have allergies (a fact that I am already aware of, and ragweed was at a high that day) and refuse me proper medicine to treat my problems. These were all cases where I had to continually return to the doctor to be treated correctly for my ailments.
16. After receiving a diagnosis of strep throat, being told by my doctor that if I'd taken her advice and lost weight my immunity would be better and I wouldn't even have strep to begin with. (WTF?!)
17. Ive had asthma for many years. I love to go walking and swimming, but when my asthma is particularly bad, I struggle with doing these things as any exercise (even going upstairs) can trigger an attack. On many occasions, I have asked my doctor for inhalers to help with these attacks, and been told that losing weight would solve the problem. My entire point in asking for the inhalers is to help me exercise. I have also been told that weight loss would solve my depression, insomnia, and the fact that my boyfriend (who is very slim) snores!

18. Once at the OB/GYN clinic I refused to be weighed in. The nurse was really adamant that I had to. I told her there was no reason for them to. My primary doctor tracks my weight, and I see a therapist for my compulsive eating. I asked her why she needed to know. She said she had to calculate my BMI to know if she should use the larger BP cuff. Looking at the BMI chart she pointed to, I told her if she couldn't tell that I was over 200lbs (I'm 5'11", and a size 26, ~270lbs) then she was the one with the problem.

19. I was denied a easier form of birth control 'because of my size'

20. I was automatically told that I fell in a morbidly obese category. I was shamed into losing weight, told that my body was ugly, and also told as a kid that I was going to be admitted into the hospital if I did not change my ways. I was active, I played sports, went to camp, and ate healthily. Anytime i go to the doctor my weight is the subject. I remember a few years ago, i was on weight watchers and had lost 89 lb. i went in for an arm pain as i was having muscle aches. the doctor did tests, x-rays, etc, and i was completely healthy and fine. after the whole exam, he said one way to relieve the pain would be to lose weight. i told him my weight loss, the fact that i went to the gym every other day, and he had nothing to say. literally nothing.

21. I had been experiencing terrible episodes of depression as well as odd episodes of being unable to sleep, super social, hyper, etc. Bipolar disorder runs in my family, so I thought this might be the start. I ended up suicidal, and my counsellor suggested I see a doctor. I saw a doctor who immediately said I was depressed because I am fat (makes no sense, because I am physically healthy and content with my body), and wrote me a prescription for an SSRI (inappropriate for my potential condition) with weight loss as a side effect. On top of all of this, he did a few other things that made me near hysterical in his office (he touched me without asking, he dismissed my horrible needle phobia, among other things). I was in a horrible place, and this doctor blaming it on the one thing I was comfortable

with pushed me deeper into the depression. I ended up seeking another doctor (and honestly, I don't know how I managed considering the state I was in).

22. A hockey injury has caused mobility issues, chronic pain, muscle spasms, chronic tension, and forced a sedentary life, my family is also predisposed to be on the large side of average. When I was 5'2 and 120, doctors would be very concerned about figuring out my pain issues from the injury and helping me reduce my issues. I did what I could, but exercise often made things worse. I ate healthfully but still gained weight. As I increased in size I found doctors less willing and eager to figure out my problems. Since I have surpassed 140lbs and am now hovering between 170-180, doctors have constantly told me to eat right and exercise more. Even when I was eating 'right' and exercising I was gaining weight, doctors had seemed to give up on helping my pain issues and insisted that weight loss would make my pain and mobility issues go away. They helped form an eating disorder and over exercise problems. I would eat one tiny meal in front of my spouse and exercise 5-8 hours a day. I still gained weight until I reached 175 and I was able to finally break the cycle of disordered eating and obsession with exercise. I developed stomach problem, digestive issues, appetite problems that persist.... because doctors kept insisting that losing weight would solve all my problems.

23. After ages of severe pain and issue with my period, I finally broke down and went to a gynecologist. The first one I saw was very clearly uncomfortable with me the minute I walked in the door. My mother and I are both fat and the aloof way we were treated, the manner in which she spoke to us, while not... overtly rude- was definitely NOT an invitation to make her my permanent gyno. She was in such a hurry to get through our visit in fact, that she neglected to take a sample during her exam that could have been biopsied to check for Cancer. Which would have been fine, if not for the fact that a year later after continued issues I finally got up the courage to seek out another gynecologist- and discovered I had Stage 3C Uterine Cancer. . The second gyno, fortunately, was INCREDIBLY re-

spectful, kind, and helpful. My oncology team was as well. I'm glad to say that I'm almost 1 year Cancer free now. But I will never forget how that first gyno treated me, and never stop wondering how different things might have been if she had done her JOB and seen me as a person instead of as a disgusting fat body.

24. I was 34 y/o when i was diagnosed with an atrial septal defect and moderate mitral valve regurgitation in June 2012. Apparently i had been asymptomatic my whole life. After a cath and a t.e.e. it was determined I needed open heart surgery. I weighed 225 pounds at the time, having worked myself down from 280 and sought medical attention when, in spite of losing weight and being at my healthiest, I was tired, out of breath and my left arm and jaw would go numb. After my diagnosis, my pediatric cardiologist spoke to me about his reluctance to operate on me at that weight and wanted me to go down to 215. Because of my heart condition I was advised to discontinue exercising and only walk so I focused on my diet. I will make a long story shorter by stating that for the next 9 months the doctor spoke with me 3 times and always lead by asking how much weight I had lost and why I wasn't reaching the goal. He'd never ask about my status or how I was feeling, I'd always have to bring it up. By May of this year my symptoms had become frequent and more intense. I was also retaining liquid in my legs and would gain up to 4 pounds of water weight by the end of the day. I received a letter in the mail that my dr had retired that month so now i had to find another dr. I'm a teacher so I waited for the school year to be over when I set up an appt with my general dr to ask for a referral. I met with a new pediatric cardiologist at the same hospital who worked with my previous cardiologist and who'd also been the doctor that has performed the t.e.e. on me so he remembered my case and couldn't understand why I hadn't undergone surgery. He scheduled me for an echo and by the time i had put my clothes back on and was waiting for him he had already called the surgeon and scheduled me an appt. my atrial defect had grown and my mitral valve had gone from moderate regurgitation to serious. My hearts was moderate to severe in size and I could go into heart failure. I had the surgery the following Friday and am now 8 weeks post op. NOT ONE of my new doctors mentioned my weight as a significant factor to delay my surgery.

Had I had the surgery when all this was discovered, I'd be one year post op. I have concluded that I was discriminated against by my previous dr because of my weight. In retrospect he'd ask me questions like how could I let myself get so big and if my husband had issues with my weight. I had always had issues with doctors and how I was treated and I understand that those same issues played into being diagnosed so late in life.

25. When I was 19, I had a horrific experience with a rheumatologist in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I was seeking medical advice because I had what I thought were bruises on shins that my primary care physician thought might be related to lupus (it later turned out to be a side effect from taking acne medicine minocycline). I don't remember the doctor giving any guidance or information related to my actual health concern; I do remember her having me undress fully (within 10 minutes of meeting her), looking at my naked body with a large frown on her face, and saying "You know your legs are really big compared to your torso, don't you?" She said a woman of my age shouldn't have so much cellulite and said that I was medically obese (although, at 5' 10" and 196 lbs, even I knew I was not). She seemed to be using scare tactics, trying to reflect a mean, harsh reality to me in order to motivate me to lose weight. All it actually accomplished was legitimizing and deepening my already significant core of self-hatred. She also convinced me (and, more importantly, my mother) that my breasts were too large and wrote a letter to my insurance company recommending me for a breast reduction -- a surgery I had a few months later and have since come to deeply regret (due to resulting effects of permanent numbness, inverted nipples, and inability to breast feed). In the hotel that night, I remember sobbing uncontrollably with self-hatred and refusing to eat dinner. 10 years later I am still in tears remembering it. By far the most formative (destructive) medical experience of my life.

26. Every single time I have ever gone to the doctor ever my weight has been mentioned. I have never been to the doctor for anything that would have been caused by my weight. It was all things such as a weird bump on my breast, and bad migraines. Both times it was blamed on my weight
27. I was once told by a doctor I was as big as a house. Another instance a nurse put on a cuff too small and took my blood pressure anyway and bruised my arm all the way around. Another instance a nurse showed me that you can take blood pressure on the lower arm or wrist. She was incredibly nice. I didn't go to the doctor for five years because of scale anxiety.
28. I went in for problems with my legs and my back, and was informed that I had to lose weight. That was it. Nothing else.
29. At a BMI of 30 and age 15-16, I was having severe abdominal pain issues along with acutely painful premenstrual cramps and extremely heavy bleeding during my period. I was told by my pediatrician to lose weight and the symptoms would go away, but began visiting an OB/GYN who took me seriously and diagnosed me with polycystic ovaries and prescribed a seasonal birth control to keep the heavy menstrual bleeding down.
30. -Doctor at a women's health clinic made me cry in the office by telling me I was still young and should "lose weight while I still can" -On first visit to Doctor's office, Doctor asks if I've ever considered bariatric surgery. -Not having equipment (weight scale, chairs) that were adequate for my body. -Having my body exposed because the office did not stock large size gowns -Being scared into having expensive and unnecessary diabetes testing when I had no health insurance (no history of diabetes, still don't have it). -Talking to nurse before nasal surgery about anesthetic, and being told "we can't weigh you with the scale we have here, the anesthesiologist will just estimate the dosage" !? -I once explained HAES to a doctor, and he seemed to be enthusiastic about it (positive experience)

31. I can pop my right knee in and out of socket and as a child I would sit and do that for hours. Now as an adult it causes me pain from time to time, especially when the weather is cold. It got particularly bad once and I figured it couldn't hurt to check up on it, get an x-ray, and see where it's at. I explained my old childhood habit to my doctor who then insisted that can't possibly be the cause of the pain, it was my weight and my knee was always going to hurt until I lost "a ton" of weight.... yet here I am 30 pounds HEAVIER than I was when I went to talk to him about my knee and it is not causing me any pain. The fact that someone could feel so entitled to tell me that I couldn't possibly know my body that well and then to use phrasing like "a ton" in such a demeaning and disrespectful way was horrifying. I never went back to see that doctor ever again.
32. I have insulin resistance, which has been treated successfully with Metformin for 2+ years. I eat a healthy diet and am physically active. I am also fat (BMI around 33-34). I occasionally test my fasting blood glucose levels to make sure that everything I'm doing is still working. Recently, I switched to a new meter and noticed several readings over a period of several weeks that were significantly higher than I had seen in the past (typical for me is around 80 fasting and these were in the high 90s). Around the same time, I noticed that some of my clothing felt tight. Concerned, I contacted my primary care doctor and asked for a referral to an endocrinologist. Instead, the doctor reiterated her assumption that my commitment to HAES/intuitive eating must mean that I'm susceptible to advertising for fast food (I don't eat fast food) and should just see a nutritionist. I have seen several nutritionists throughout my life and all have assured me that my eating is perfectly normal and healthy. After some pushing, I finally got a referral to an endo, who ran a full workup, which came back completely normal, including insulin levels, fasting glucose, cholesterol, etc.. As it turns out the new meter was not calibrated accurately. The endo still asked me if I wanted diet pills to help me lose weight and then told me that I should take up running and yoga because they help with weight loss.

33. Being told that my runny nose and scratchy throat was due to my being overweight, and could be prevented if I lost weight.
34. Almost any visit to the doctor, if I decide to even go, for any reason I decide to go, I'm expecting my weight to be the blamed. For me to be blamed for feeling sick, or still my weight is an issue if everything is fine with me. It discourages me from asking for help, because I don't feel I am being looked at as a whole, a whole body, a whole person. When I go to the doctor I feel less if a person, I am only a weight problem.
35. Just one? - The NP at my gynecologist's office refused to renew my hormonal birth control prescription (Nuvaring) because she claimed I was too fat for it. I did extensive research, including speaking with multiple representatives at Nuvaring and Planned Parenthood, and everyone other than the NP stated that there is no known weight limit with Nuvaring, and that increased weight does not decrease the effectiveness of Nuvaring as far as it has been studied. - As a child, my pediatrician convinced my mother to put me on reduced-calorie diets starting when I was literally a toddler. Every pediatrician appointment I can remember from growing up included a significant amount of time lecturing me on the importance of weight loss. - A different practitioner at the same gyno practice spent the entirety of my appointment lecturing me on the importance of diet and exercise, leaving me almost no time to discuss concerns prompting my visit, which was unrelated to my size. - blood pressure cuffs and hospital gowns that are embarrassingly too small
36. The other day I spoke with a dietician who was at my school for giggles and free fruit. She assumed I had never eaten fruits or vegetables before.
37. Medical professionals insist on telling me my weight, regardless of my asking them not to and telling them I have an eating disorder. In addition, medical professionals consistently tell me to lose weight and have been actively rude and dis-

respectful of me, despite said eating disorder and corresponding heart conditions being well documented in my medical documents.

38. I was in to see my gynecologist. I am overweight and mentioned concern, the doctor spoke with me about my overall health being good but room for improvement. I appreciated her being honest about the effects of being overweight/obesity, and took her advice to improve diet.
39. One time recently a doctor, I believe a cardiovascular specialist, proceeded to tell me random diet tips like "share a portion with a friend at Cheesecake factory" (I don't eat at chain restaurants) even though I had just proven to be perfectly healthy. I mentioned that I like to work out, etc. and he said not to worry about exercise that I should just eat less, without knowing anything about how I actually eat. I also can't imagine that it's medically sound for a doctor to tell someone to not worry about moving their bodies.
40. every single experience I have had (good or bad) with medical personnel ends up with the "talk" about my weight.
41. I have called medical advice hot lines and went to the doctor for medical problems and usually the first suggestion they have to alleviate my problems is to loose weight. This suggestion is counter productive as I'm sure no one can loose 20 plus pounds over night. It prevents the doctors and nurses from actually doing their job to alleviate pain or give an accurate prognosis when they only focus on weight. I remember having chest pains from what the doctors diagnosed as acid reflux at the time. (it ended up being that I had a parasite). Every time I called the advice line the first thing they would say was to loose weight and the same with the doctors. By the time they actually listened to me I had lost almost 40 lbs in 3 months because I COULD NOT eat anything. They eventually did a procedure that showed the real cause of my pain as having bacteria in my system. Though I had lost the weight, actually medical treatment (antibiotics) is what had stopped my pain. Had they took me seriously earlier instead of being fatphobic I would have been a lot better, a lot faster. Fatphobia kept my nurses/ doctors from giving immediate and adequate advice and care.

42. One of my most recent negative experiences was when I was having several extra tests done for my annual physical and all came back great even though my doctor told me i "Probably had diabetes" because of my weight. When she told me the results show I didn't she said "this is just because your young but if you stay the same weight and you get older you WILL get diabetes." Later towards the end of our appointment I asked for a referral for a therapist and she said "obesity leads to depression too you know." Not only did I not go through her referral for therapy but it prevented me from going back to the doctor for over a year even when I really needed to. She was the worse and it took everything in me not yell at her how fucking stupid someone could be and still have MD at the end of their name. I eventually got a new doctor who is also thin but who has been great so far.
43. I was prescribed phen phen in 7th grade by an overweight male doctor. I lost so much weight so fast it was unhealthy, but he kept reassuring me I would be happy when I was able to start high school weighing less. I would eat so little I would black out when I stood up and my hair started falling out. I eventually stopped taking it and never went back to him. I also recently was given a BMI print out by my gyno where had hilighted the "morbid obesity" line for me... I'm 5'4 and 220 lbs and do NOT consider myself morbidly obese in any way shape or form. I found this really hurtful and shaming.
44. When I was getting discharged from a hospital stay, a hospital employee expressed anger asking why I couldn't pay my share of the bill, because I knew I would have a bill since I had a baby. The procedure I had was an appendectomy, not a baby delivery.
45. My new doctor berated me because I have gained weight. I told her, I should probably have my thyroid checked, as I have not had it checked in one year after moving states, since I was not doing anything different. She continued to berate me about choosing to be overweight because I'm a biology major and I need to do "research" on the consequences of being over weight and should know better. She then listed all the things that would eventually take my life. This woman raised

her voice at me, and shook her head at me the whole time. She then berated my choice to move states to marry my husband.

46. Being told I was "too young" to be so heavy at 16 when I'd gone in for a yeast infection. Being told not to eat the skin on a chicken by an overweight old man doctor when I was 11. As if THAT was the issue.

47. I have had so many I have included them in a memoir to be published in November. The worst involved a failure to use proper imaging equipment for a cardiac cath done on a large person. That resulted in my needing THREE separate surgeries to fix problems caused.

48. I always get frustrated that the staff at my doctor's office will not use the right size cuff to take my blood pressure. This is ongoing concern as they are consistently recording the wrong blood pressure.

49. Someone asked me repeatedly if I was "sure" that I didn't have type diabetes, despite the fact that they had 1) my medical record open in front of them, which listed the (normal) results of my most recent blood tests, and 2) that I probably eat more healthfully and exercise more than the average person in the US...I just happen to be fat 'n fabulous.

50. Where do I begin? When I was in my later teens, I went to my gynecologist for my yearly exam. Up until then, I'd only experienced the microaggressions of encouraged weight loss in medical settings, as I was far heavier than someone my height "should be." This time, she waited until she had her fingers uncomfortably jammed inside me before she really laid into me about my weight. I mean, my feet were in the stirrups and I was already wincing from discomfort, and she was recommending gastric bypass to me. She peppered in all kinds of shame, like, "You're __ years old and you weigh ___!" as if this was the greatest tragedy of mankind, that I was wasting a whole human life for being so enormously fat at such a young, tender age. I felt violated, to say the least. Years later, in my mid-20's, I went in to have a breast exam after concern of finding a lump that was

questionable. The doctor was doing a thorough job, making me hold my arms this way and that, laying me down and feeling all the way up into my armpits to screen for anything unusual. "So," she said, my breast in her hand, "you eat a lot of fried food, don't you?" Even though I was just there to have my breasts screened for abnormalities, there she was pushing weight loss. I told her I was addressing my weight with another medical professional, and it took her several times of my saying as much for her to accept that as an answer. She really wanted to badger me into a discussion about my diet and activity; I found it disrespectful of my clearly stated boundaries. I have sat through so many lectures about diet and exercise. Hours of my life (and their life) wasted telling me things that I already know, that I'm already very knowledgeable about, that I already practice. As if hearing the unabridged version of "eat vegetables and go for walks" enough times will magically melt me. I have gotten treated like an unworthy animal by medical professionals (a different gynecologist, an emergency clinic doctor, an optometrist). They would touch me a little as possible, disgust clearly written across their grimaces. Their care was slipshod and rushed, anything to get away from me as quick as possible. They wouldn't make eye contact, wouldn't engage in any minor pleasantries. I have, on many occasions, had to stand around embarrassed while several nurses and front desk staff tried to figure out the mathematics involved in using the extra weight on a balance beam scale. They'd call over their co-workers and ask, get out the dusty manual and read, lack confidence in the way they did the math. I've had a whole station worth of nurses gather and stare as my bed was wheeled out of my hospital room and over to radiology for imaging. They stared unabashedly while I sheepishly smiled and waved, bothered that the sight of me would draw so much attention. My body is viewed by others as such a broken, wrong, unworthy, disgusting, abhorrent thing... that I honestly don't think I can recall any experience with a medical professional/practitioner that I would call positive. And that is so sad.

51. There are so many. When 36 weeks pregnant, a doctor at the hospital told me that they might not want to have me give birth there, and that I would probably die in labor because I am so fat, despite having no complications during my previous pregnancy and labor. They also tested me 3 times for gestational diabetes because they refused to believe that I did not have it. I have been refused an MRI on my knee, the specialist would not even look at it, because he said I am going to die and any problems relating to my joints must be fat-related, despite my medical history of injuries and dislocation. I was told to have gastric bypass, and my knee would magically repair itself. I was sneered at and mocked by nursing staff when the coveralls given to visitors to surgical recovery rooms would not completely zip up, while my daughter was lying there after surgery. I was also told that my (exercise-induced) heel spurs were cause from my fat, while a thin acquaintance with the same doctor, who also had heel spurs, was offered treatment and sympathy for hers.
52. My doctor told me a few years ago that I needed to lose 100lbs. His only advice was to become vegetarian. I still haven't lost an ounce. In fact, I've gained.
53. Gastroenterologist who actually yelled at me when I tried repeatedly to tell him no on a severe weight loss regime... To find out a couple of weeks later that I had almost died of sepsis from un-diagnosed appendicitis.
54. Negative: I went in with a sports-related overuse injury and was told "you know, this wouldn't happen if you exercised." Positive: I was giving my fat activist medical boundary speech to my new practitioner about how I would not be dieting, and would appreciate it if he didn't recommend it to me. His response "Why would I recommend something with a 95% failure rate? That's just bad treatment."
55. Being offered unsolicited weight loss advice when visiting the doctor about a UTI
56. How they react when they first look at your weight and how they predict all the illness you will have base on your weight.

57. I've never had a negative or positive experience with a health professional with regards to my body weight (I am in the "obese" range of BMI). I have been told that losing weight would help with two conditions I've had, and it has, but was never shamed for being overweight in doing so. I wanted a non-medical intervention and their advice was to lose weight. I was told losing weight would lower my blood pressure, and it did. And that it would get rid of my amenorrhea, and it did.

58. One time I had a pinched nerve in my back. Not knowing that was the issue I went to my doctor. She told me it was because I was overweight and that my back was hurting because my body was like a "bus on an office desk". I was 18 at the time and heart broken. I went to the chiropractor after NO help from her and he fixed me right up.

59. I reported to my GP that I was feeling depressed. Rather than helping me treat my mental issues, he suggested I lose weight.

60. Consultation with Weight Loss surgeon assumed I consumed large amounts of food.

Survey respondents offered the following harm reduction suggestions*:

*These results were summarized rather than reported verbatim because of significant overlap in responses.

- Bigger blood pressure cuff
- Get regular scales that are digital.
- Get steps for the beds
- Do not treat every cold, ache, or pain like it is because of my weight.
- Do not assume that I will be non-compliant.
- Ask yourself, "What would I tell a thin person?"
- Stop treating fat patients like they are unworthy of your time

- Practice kindness
- Exercise humanity (some variation of the phrase “I’m a human being” was major recurring theme in responses)
- Give respect
- Don’t make assumptions about eating habits, exercise habits or medical history
- Give eye contact
- Participants reported that they receive humiliation and reminders of their weight “every minute of every day” and that this is not the treatment they want from doctors or nurses
- Do not shame me
- Don’t demean me
- Get consent for weight loss discussions – ask patient if weight loss is something they are interested in discussing – better yet ask them WHAT they are interested in discussing and that’s it.
- Presume honesty from patients

Responses to a survey conducted by Virgie Tovar—Published September 24, 2013

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