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Exploring Doctor's Barriers and Facilitators on Prescribing Physical Activity for Childhood Obesity: A Qualitative Study

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Introduction:
Despite strong evidence recommending PA(PA) as an effective method for managing childhood obesity, physicians frequently encounter challenges in integrating it during their consultations. This qualitative study is to investigate physicians' perceived barriers and facilitators in prescribing PA for children with obesity, offering a comprehensive understanding of the factors that affect their clinical behaviours.

Methods:
Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with twenty doctors working in the Sports and PA Medicine clinic in University of Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC). Participants were sampled purposively, representing medical officers and specialists. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis guided by2 principles of grounded theory.

Results:
Findings revealed that doctors viewed PA as essential component of a larger approach to obesity management as PA provided benefits to the children especially when initiated early. However, doctors faced multifaceted barriers in prescribing including lifestyle pressures, children's low motivation, unequal resources, doctor's own limitations, systemic constraints, and weak parental involvement. On the other hand, effective PA prescription for the children was facilitated by children's self-motivation, supportive parents, passionate doctors, enabling resources and professional networks. The strategies to empower and operationalize PA prescription encompass strengthening family-based interventions, integrating child-centred motivational approaches, enhancing clinicians' competency through targeted training, fostering multi-sector partnerships, and developing supportive ecosystems across community and healthcare policy levels to ensure sustainable implementation.

Conclusion:
Doctors recognized the importance of PA counselling in managing childhood obesity, but they faced barriers from children, parents and resource constraints in implementing the counselling. It is important to identify these barriers and implement effective strategies that support the doctors.

Keywords: Childhood obesity, PA, prescription, qualitative study, sports medicine