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TALKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT OA
Setting: doctor's examining room in medical office

Peering at her computer with a quizzical look, the doctor notices something she had not recognized on previous visits by this patient.

Doctor C: Hmm . . . I see from your chart that you've lost a lot of weight during the past two years, Sally. Now don't get me wrong — this much of a loss is a *good* thing in your case. But I do need to know if your weight loss was *by choice*?

Sally: Oh, my gosh, **yes!** I've tried losing weight my whole life, and nothing ever worked for me before, at least not long-term. If you have a couple of minutes I'd like to talk to you about how I've been able to maintain **this** weight loss and improve my health. Hopefully, you can share this information with other patients in your practice who are struggling with weight issues.

Dr. C.: Sure, what's going on? How did you do this?

Sally: Have you heard of Overeaters Anonymous? I credit my weight loss and overall better health to OA. I had started a regular exercise program, and I saw that the regular exercise helped me feel stronger and breathe better; but while I couldn't stop eating, it didn't matter -- I couldn't stick to an exercise routine and my weight kept going up.

Dr. C.: I think a lot of people know what they should do, but have a hard time doing it.

Sally: Yup, that was me. I *knew* all about nutrition and exercise. Fortunately, a friend mentioned OA to me and invited me to a meeting. When I started attending regularly, everything changed. I found out pretty quick that I'm a compulsive eater. Our fellowship encourages members to share their own experiences honestly and listen to others. As we talk about the principles of refraining from compulsive eating, we pass on our recovery from one person to the next.

Dr. C.: That's really interesting, Sally. OA sounds like an organization that a **lot** of people need to know **more** about.

Sally: We think so! I'd like to leave this information with you so you can understand better how our fellowship works. (*Hands doctor the pamphlet called "Introducing OA to Health Care Professionals"*) Basically OA is very much like Alcoholics Anonymous; we believe eating

compulsively is a disease — like alcoholism. OA is for people who have tried many different ways to manage their eating behaviors with little or no success.

We recover because we attend meetings, where we find people who accept us *as we are right now* and who support us as we continue in recovery. By reading our literature and listening to others who are recovering, we learn how to use OA tools. We find sponsors to walk us through the 12 Steps to increase our self-awareness, and we learn to focus on the spiritual and emotional aspects of the problem as well as the physical.

Dr. C: Are the 12 Steps of OA similar to those in Alcoholics Anonymous?

Sally: Almost identical: we just substitute the words “*food*” and “*compulsive eater*” for the words “*alcohol*” and “*alcoholic*”. As a physician you know obesity is a serious health problem in our country. I expect you have patients looking for help with compulsive overeating — or restricting, or binging and purging. I would love to leave these pamphlets with you to give to patients dealing with an eating disorder. (*Hands doctor a group of pamphlets, including "Introducing OA".*)

My name and number are on each of these, so they can call with questions about meeting times and locations. We also have a website with lots of OA information. (*Sally points to web address on the pamphlets.*) Our goal this year is to reach out through the medical community to encourage those struggling with weight issues to visit their first OA meeting. We don't think it will be their last. Of course, we suggest that everyone work closely with their doctor or a nutritionist as they begin this journey. (*Long pause*) Well . . . what do you say, Dr. C?

Dr. C.: Great, Sally. I would love to have another tool right here at my desk — something to hand to patients who are struggling with weight problems. Thank you! Does OA charge a fee or have membership dues?

Sally: No, it's a free fellowship. We're self-supporting through voluntary contributions by our members. Some are able to make a donation, and others can't. Either way, everyone is welcome who wants to quit eating compulsively — that's the **only** criteria for membership. By the way, both men and women achieve success in this program. (*pause*) Well, I guess you can tell I'm a big OA fan, right? Here's a list of local meeting times and locations.

Dr. C.: Your enthusiasm speaks volumes to me, because I see your results right here on your chart. I'll be glad to help spread the word and watch for more success stories among my patients. And I want to talk with my colleagues about OA, too. I appreciate you bringing this information to my attention, Sally.