

Bilaga D. Abstrakt till European Congress of Obesity, maj 2008.

Efficacy and consistency of a franchising weight loss programme in the Swedish commercial sector

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Background: Commercial weight loss programmes with a scalable structure, operating according to a defined manual including regular quality controls, can partner health professionals when public care is lacking.

Aim: To clarify consistency of weight loss (across years and locations) of a commercial franchise company (Itrim) in Sweden.

Methods: Weight loss at 12 months was analysed for the years 2004-2006, across 11 centres (6 cities), before and after adjustment for baseline body weight, age, gender, and group session attendance. 970 consecutively recruited participants (BMI 31.5 kg/m² [sd 5.5], age 47.1 yrs [11.4], 86 % women) were included. The programme consisted of 20 one hour group sessions on diet and exercise behaviour change, physical activity (circle training 2-3 times/wk á 30-45 min + pedometers), individual coaching at 0, 10, 26 and 52 weeks, meal replacements, home assignments, and food and exercise diaries. Participants paid their own fee (approx. Euro1000/yr.).

Results: Mean weight loss at 12 months was 10.5 kg (95 % CI: 10.0 to 11.1). In unadjusted analysis, there was a significant weight loss difference between centers (p=0.03) but not between years (p=0.16). After adjustment for covariates, the difference in weight loss between centers was attenuated (p=0.10). Predictors of weight loss were instead baseline body weight (Beta=-0.3 per baseline kg, p<0.001), group session attendance (Beta=-0.49 per session, p<0.001), gender (Beta=2.4 men>women, p<0.002), and age (Beta=0.06 younger>older, p<0.008).

Conclusions: Commercial companies, operating according to a defined manual including regular quality controls, can provide consistent weight loss results across time and locations.

Conflict of interest: EH works part time as Itrim's Programme Director. JS and CM are members of Itrims Scientific Advisory Board.