**Media is fuelling eating disorders, say psychiatrists**

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**The Royal College of Psychiatrists is calling on the media to stop promoting unhealthy body images and "glamorising" eating disorders.**

It says the media contributes to eating disorders, particularly among young people.

It wants to see people with more diverse body shapes represented by advertisers and the press, and calls for a new ethical editorial code.

But a magazine editor says teen magazines already act responsibly.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists criticises the media for using underweight models and airbrushing pictures to make models appear physically perfect.

It calls for an end to the use of underweight models.

It also proposes a kite mark scheme to signpost when an image has been digitally manipulated to make models appear more perfect.

**Research evidence**

Dr Adrienne Key from the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Eating Disorders Section said: "There is a growing body of research that shows the media plays a part in the development of eating disorder symptoms - particularly in adolescents and young people.

"Although biological and genetic factors play an important role in the development of these disorders, psychological and social factors are also significant.

"That's why we are calling on the media to take greater responsibility for the messages it sends out."

The psychiatrists are concerned that many magazine articles are unbalanced, giving advice about dieting without providing information about the dangers of extreme diets.

They also argue that articles which criticise the bodies of celebrities can make readers more dissatisfied with their own bodies.

**Ethical code**

The RCP wants the next government to set up a forum which includes politicians, advertising agencies, magazine editors, relevant regulatory bodies and eating disorder experts to draw up a new ethical editorial code.

Liberal Democrat MP, Jo Swinson, is putting down a parliamentary motion this week supporting the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

She said it was now "crystal clear that media does play a critical role in the development and maintenance of negative body image and eating disorders."

The eating disorder charity, beat, has launched a manifesto urging politicians to do more to help people with eating disorders.

Beat's chief executive, Susan Ringwood, said: "The media is a powerful influence and we know how vulnerable some people at risk of eating disorders can be to its visual images in particular.

"We know there is more that can be done to make that influence a positive one, and adopting the recommendations of the College's statement would be an important step."

**'Powerful influence'**

Dr Ian Campbell, a Nottingham GP and spokesman for the charity Weight Concern, said the way the media glamorised thinness made it harder for obese patients to lose weight.

"If you are heavy, reading magazines can diminish self-esteem.

"This can make it more likely that people may develop eating disorders."

But Annabel Brog, editor of the best selling teen magazine Sugar, said her magazine already acts responsibly and the statement from the Royal College of Psychiatrists was "incredibly frustrating" and "disheartening".

"We try so hard to be a positive influence on weight and body image.

"I would challenge anyone to look at Sugar over the last three years and try to find examples which could contribute to eating disorders."

Whilst welcoming the thrust of the recommendations, she thinks it would be impractical to put kite marks on pictures which had been digitally manipulated.

"It would be difficult to know where to draw the line.

"Often digital manipulation is used to brighten up the colours rather than to make the model look prettier or more perfect," she said.