SCI-TECH

"Oh, thunder only happens when it's raining"
DREAMS FLEETWOOD MAC

Websites ease GLP-1 access without doctor oversight, Yale study finds

BY MOHID KHAN AND EDIS MESIC
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER AND STAFF REPORTER

Weight loss drugs like GLP-1s have become increasingly popular among Americans — but not everyone is acquiring them with clinical oversight, according to a Yale study.

Researchers at the Yale School of Medicine in early July published an article examining the ease of GLP-1 access for telehealth patients. After posing as a potential patient on telehealth websites, the team of researchers found that 92 percent of websites prescribed GLP-1 medications with minimal clinical oversight.

"I remember going up to one of these compounding pharmacies, and they were selling oral tirzepatide for around $100 to $200. And remember, at that time, the out-of-pocket price to get semaglutide or tirzepatide was well over $1,000," Ashwin Chetty MED '27, one of the first authors of the study, said. "So this was truly amazing, and they were just so open about it."

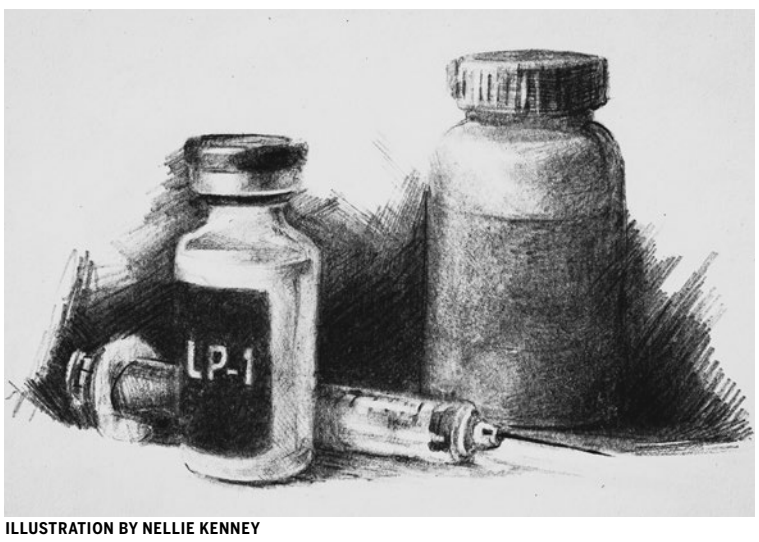


ILLUSTRATION BY NELLIE KENNEY
In a recent study, researchers at the Yale School of Medicine posed as a hypothetical patient to find that GLP-1s can be obtained within minutes on telehealth systems, often without clinician interaction.

The main problem: FDA-approved GLP-1s were too expensive for the everyday American. That's where telehealth comes in. According to Chetty, telehealth platforms provide faster and "more convenient care where you don't need to go to a primary care clinic."

As a result, drug manufacturers turned to direct-to-consumer models, selling to patients directly through these telehealth platforms and therefore keeping prices low.

Instead of selling FDA-approved GLP-1s, online telehealth platforms sell compounded GLP-1s, which are custom-mixed by pharmacies. While that decreases costs of the medication itself, compounded GLP-1s are not FDA-approved.

However, that's not why compounding started in the first place. According to Chetty, compounding was intended for patients who could not take the medication as prescribed, such as an allergy to a component.

"You can imagine when you have many, many different patients with all these different specific modifications that they need, the FDA can't require a trial for each of these new medications," Chetty said.

According to the study, many of the sites' basic questionnaires asked "leading questions" that patients were unlikely to decline but failed to inquire about patients' eating disorder history.

In some cases, GLP-1s were mixed with substances like vitamin B12 that claimed to reduce nausea, when in reality, no clinical evidence would suggest that.

Some telehealth platforms allowed video or phone visits, allowing for engagement with the clinician.

However, Reshma Ramachandran MED '22, a co-author and assistant professor at the Yale School of Medicine, said the team found that "there wasn't really information relayed around risks and benefits of the product."

"It was very much like a kind of a 'pro forma' sort of visit, like, 'Let's check the box,'" Ramachandran said in an interview.

Ramachandran said another major problem is the motivations of these platforms, which may not necessarily have the patient's safety in mind.

She cited a particularly concerning anecdote, where doctors were over-prescribing medication to the hypothetical patient to the point of overdose.

"There were three platforms, including one that had a video visit, where the same doctor prescribed the same medication to the same patient across multiple platforms, which is fairly egregious, right?" Ramachandran said.

Proponents of the online telehealth systems disagree with the study's viewpoints, arguing that these platforms expand access for people who couldn't receive obesity treatment otherwise.

Alissa Chen, an assistant professor at the School of Medicine and a co-author of the study, suggested a balance between access with safety.

"In an ideal situation, patients would be evaluated for obesity treatment by their primary care doctor and then referred to a platform to receive obesity treatment, if the primary care doctor lacked the availability to do this," Chen wrote in an email to the News. "These platforms would then provide routine check-ins on side effects, amount of weight loss and nutritional and exercise therapies."

Most experts interviewed by the News agreed that in the future, telehealth platforms will continue as is.

But Chetty had hope.

"I think there is a world where telehealth and a good standard of care can coexist. Telehealth can really improve access for many people," she said. "You can do telehealth and still do it much better than what the current state is."

The research letter was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

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Fashion made from trash displayed at City Hall upcycling exhibition

BY ALISSA SUNDRANI
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Upcycling fans from across Connecticut gathered in New Haven over the weekend to put on a fashion show using repurposed material.

The "Eco Eleganza" was organized by Rebekah Fraser '03, who runs the nonprofit Trash to Fashion, and was the product of workshops hosted across Connecticut over the last two years. At these workshops, "Trashinistas" — Fraser's term for artists who turn trash into fashion, who ranged in age from seven to over 70 — generated ideas, learned skills, sourced materials and created apparel all from upcycled material.

"You teach people how to turn trash into fashion, to reduce pollution and give people a lived experience in environmental action that is rooted in joy, creativity and community," Fraser said.

Fraser said she has been making trash fashion since 2007 and is passionate about sharing her love for the art through events such as the one held Friday.

A goal for the events is to be accessible and guide participants through the hands-on element of turning trash into fashion, according to Derek Faulkner, a project coordinator at Southern Connecticut State University who volunteers with Trash to Fashion. The event was free and open to the public, but past workshops have required pre-registration in order to have enough materials and food for everyone and minimize waste.

In the face of the "doom and gloom" surrounding climate change discussion, Trash to Fashion hopes to instill optimism and play within the creative process. Joy was a recurring theme at the event.



ALISSA SUNDRANI / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
On Friday, upcycling enthusiasts gathered at City Hall to celebrate a display of upcycled fashion created during statewide workshops held over the past two years. Attendees ranged from young children to septuagenarians..

"You can do this. You can do something. And it can be fun," Faulkner said. "You don't need to be a fashion model or a wealthy designer, a well known notorious designer in this region, you can still do stuff, you can still upcycle."

What constituted "trash" was broad in scope, encompassing discarded textiles and the soles of shoes.

Kathryn Frund, a local artist, created a garment sourced entirely from Goodwill, constructed from a beaded sari and a men's button-down Oxford shirt. The necklace was made from tin cans.

Faulkner and Michael Corey, who is "perhaps Trash to Fashion's biggest fan," according to the wall label displayed next to his creation, created a garment that featured a repurposed Target bag and a structural hat made from garment pads.

Eight-year-old Sage Wintermeyer said she enjoyed the process of making a dress with her mother.

"It's very comfortable and it makes me feel proud," Wintermeyer said.

Nana Acquah, a longtime New Haven resident, said he was glad to attend the event, which gave him creative designs to use as inspiration.

Looking at Wintermeyer's work, he remarked on how "that shows that creativity is born with us, and it's up to us to develop it, and it's up to our community to help us bring that to life."

Trash to Fashion established a partnership with Dwight Hall at Yale in 2025.

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