Authors’ Response: Time to forget about obesity
From IAN ROBERTS and PHIL EDWARDS*

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We would like to thank Prof. Manuel Gallar for his letter in response to our article ‘Population adiposity and climate change’. We were disappointed, however, that he focuses on ‘obesity’ throughout his points. ‘Obese’ is a medical construct used to describe an individual whose body mass index (BMI) exceeds 30 kg/m². Our article addresses population BMI distributions and, as such, we are more concerned with their central tendency (e.g. average BMI) than with relatively arbitrary cut-points in the upper tail of the distribution. We respond to each of his points below.

(i) Our study quantifies the amount of energy from food that is required to sustain two hypothetical populations with different distributions of BMI. Both the populations include healthy, overweight and obese individuals. Agriculture and food production is a significant contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions and we believe that our estimate of the emissions attributable to population increases in overweight and obesity is relevant to, and can inform, debates on climate change mitigation policies.

(ii) We agree that emissions from total global food production are important and have estimated the excess emissions due to increases in population adiposity.

(iii) We applied our assumption about types of cars used for transportation of the individuals in both of our hypothetical populations. As with any model, it is perfectly reasonable to question the assumptions.

(iv) We have estimated the food- and transport-related emissions due to increased adiposity at a population level only, and do not report them separately for any sub-group.

(v) We agree that the food industry could influence what populations eat and might play an important role in addressing trends towards increased population adiposity.

(vi) We have only modelled the food- and transport-related emissions due to increased population adiposity, but agree that our model could be extended to include consumption of other commodities.

(vii) Our article estimates greenhouse gas emissions due to increased population-level adiposity. If average BMI continues to increase in many countries of the world, perhaps the over-consumption of food and fossil fuel-based transport may follow smoking as becoming socially unacceptable.

We are disheartened by any claims of ‘serious methodological mistakes’ in our study, but accept that Prof. Gallar and others are entitled to question our model assumptions. We stand by our conclusion that promotion of a healthy BMI is good for both individual health and for the health of the planet.

Conflict of interest: None declared.

A response to Dr Michael Oakes: advancing research into SES mechanisms that affect health
From PETER SMITH* and JOHN FRANK

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We read with interest the commentary of our recent paper1 by Dr Michael Oakes.2 While we agree with many of the points raised by Dr Oakes, we would like to clarify a few points where we feel our work may have been misrepresented.

Our trust in the exposure measure
We agree that more information concerning our main independent variable would be of use. Unfortunately, we do not have access to detailed information on the university attended by each respondent. We take Dr