According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), over 60 percent of the adult population in the United States is overweight and approximately one third is considered obese.

Multiple medical conditions are associated with obesity, yet many obese people hesitate to come to health care facilities because they do not feel welcome. I don’t mean that “stay out” signs are hanging at the entrances, but if facilities are not equipped to care for people of size, the signs might as well be hanging.

When you enter any door of a health care facility or enter a waiting area you should find seating available to comfortably accommodate those with larger weights and/or widths. In addition, there is nothing worse than having to be told you can’t be weighed because there is not a scale large enough or to have a gown given to you that only covers half of what it should cover.

Processes should be in place to help assure that bariatric patient care equipment and furniture are available when the patient arrives. The obese often feel health care workers are biased against caring for them. But often the health care worker is frustrated because the appropriately-sized equipment is not readily available, jeopardizing not only the patient’s safety, but their own. This frustration can lead to the appearance of anger or prejudice.

Insensitivity plays such an important role in an obese person’s decision to seek care that it keeps those who need the care the most from seeking it before it becomes an emergency.

Facilities should have beds, chairs, stretchers, scales, transfer equipment, wheel chairs, operating room tables/equipment and rehab equipment available to safely care for the obese population. Having recently been named an American Society of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Center of Excellence (COE), St. Luke’s Hospital-Allentown Campus has proven such availability. We are here to not only serve those obese patients considering or having bariatric surgery, but to serve any patient struggling with the disease of obesity. Yes, disease.

By being welcoming to all patients, we hope we can reach many individuals before associated medical conditions worsen. Developing trust may be the first step in allowing those suffering from obesity to learn more about bariatric surgery so they can make a more informed decision about whether surgery is right for them or not.