



Fat activists challenge medical 'panic' over obesity

Neil Bramwell

A 'FAT STUDIES' conference staged by academics championing pride in obesity has been described by a public health campaigner as worrying and inflammatory.

The Fat Studies: Reflective Intersections conference, held at Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand, featured topics including fat pride, obesity panic and weight loss surgery.

The movement, which publishes a journal, *Fat Studies – An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society*, describes itself as “a small but emerging interdisciplinary field that challenges existing assumptions about fatness and fat people”.

Conference keynote speaker Dr Samantha Murray, a lecturer in cultural studies at Sydney's Macquarie University, describes herself as “a feminist

who remains (and identifies as) fat, and as a woman who has undergone weight loss surgery”. She was unable to comment due to illness.

The conference organiser Dr Cat Pausé, a lecturer in human development at Massey, said that stereotypes and stigma were applied to people with fat bodies but the relationship between weight and health was complicated.

“As a fat activist and a fat scholar, I want to change the national discourse on fatness. Fat people deserve the same rights and dignity as non-fat people, which we currently don't have,” she said.

But Jane Martin, executive manager of Australia's Obesity Policy Coalition, said the use of terms such as 'obesity panic' was inflammatory and added: “It's worrying. The health risks of obesity are not open to debate – the evidence is overwhelming.

“We need to create a supportive environment to empower people to make health decisions and maybe there is some work to be done in the area of stigmatisation. But some of their language is emotive and quite confrontational.”