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Research report

An exploration of patient experiences of bariatric surgery

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Aim and background

My research aims to understand the patient experience of bariatric surgery as an intervention for the treatment of adult obesity, focusing on the first two years after surgery. The UK rates of adult obesity (defined as a BMI of over 30kg/m²) are currently estimated to be 25% with a projected trajectory of 60% of men and 50% of women by 2050. In the UK, bariatric surgery may be offered to patients who meet the eligibility criteria as outlined by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) which are a BMI of over 35 and the presence of obesity-related illnesses such as Type 2 diabetes and obstructive sleep apnoea, or a BMI of above 40; however for patients with a BMI of over 50, bariatric surgery can be a first line weight-loss intervention (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2006). Bariatric surgery is generally positioned as an option after other weight-loss methods have been attempted unsuccessfully and is usually perceived as a final option from the perspective of those who seek it.

Depending on the procedure involved, surgery offers restrictive and/or malabsorptive effects which offer long-term and sustained weight loss (Sjöström et al., 2007) and many experience improvement in obesity-related illnesses such as Type 2 Diabetes (Sjöström, 2013), which are generally interpreted as positive changes from a weight-loss and health improvement perspective. Alongside, there is a process of adjustment experienced by people who undergo bariatric surgery, which is underpinned by changes to appearance and eating habits, which may impact on other areas of their lives. There are known societal perceptions and judgements of bariatric surgery, which are largely negative. However, there has been little published work examining this phenomena from the patient perspective, which would provide insight into how bariatric surgery alters peoples' lives and the individual and common processes used to adjust to a different life in a surgically altered body. Using the narratives of those who have experienced surgery, the findings will contribute towards building more a more informed societal perceptions of

surgery, as it becomes more commonplace as an intervention.

Methods

The research study used grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014) to construct an explanatory theory of how patients adjust to life after bariatric surgery, focusing on the temporality and context in which these adjustments are made in the first two years after surgery. Data have been collected from semi-structured interviews with 15 participants (9 female, 6 male) within two years of surgery.

Summary of results

Early results indicate that participants seek that participants strive to reach an equilibrium between losing weight, learning to live with a new body in terms of appearance, function and re-establishing new social and eating habits. However, further analysis is needed to define the context and conditions in which these occur.

Conclusions

The findings of my research are intended to provide information to those who may seek bariatric surgery in the future, and to inform healthcare professionals

and policy makers to help understand the bariatric journey from the patient perspective. By raising awareness of the experiences of those who have experienced bariatric surgery, the research is proposed to contribute towards constructing a greater societal understanding and acceptance of this intervention. This will be increasingly important as trajectories of both adult obesity and bariatric surgery increase according to current predictions.

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