

Title: Voices from the Hinterland Part 1: Rural dwelling weight loss patients' perspectives of accessibility and care.

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**Background:** Recent increases in provincial funding for weight loss surgery (WLS) has increased capacity and accessibility for individuals struggling with morbid obesity in Ontario. For patients residing a distance from the Bariatric Centres of Excellence, access to specialized resources are limited and remote.

**Objective:** To understand the challenges WLS patients remote from the Centres of Excellence. The presented data is embedded within a larger research program that examines WLS as experienced by patients, local health care teams and allied health care providers residing in centers. This presentation will focus on data collected from WLS patients.

**Methods:** Qualitative method using focus group and interview data from purposively sampled WLS patients residing in a small urban setting. Transcribed data were analyzed using progressive coding.

**Results:** Two primary themes were identified relating to structure and agency. WLS patients discussed navigating structural issues such as obtaining referrals, dealing with distance barriers, and obtaining relevant support from local health care teams post-op. WLS patients demonstrated their personal agency when interacting with local health care teams and the various centers of excellence (which are usually located in more urban settings). Personal agency was evident in a wide variety of areas, such as seeking or forming support arrangements, constructing knowledge networks and developing strategies to effectively access formal support from their local health care teams.

**Discussion:** Encouraging and facilitating these agentic attempts may further aid in bridging care between surgical centers and local health care teams and other allied health workers working with their WLS patients.