

A Shift in Perspective: Not “What’s Wrong and How Do We Fix it?”, but “What’s Right and How Do We Use It”?

Bariatric surgery has emerged as a promising tool for sustainable weight loss and concomitant reduction in health problems. Psychology’s role thus far in the field of Bariatrics has focused on assessing patients’ psychological status pre-surgery to determine eligibility. To date, much like the proverbial glass that is “half empty”, the study of psychological resilience among patients presenting for bariatric surgery has been largely ignored in favour of looking at the impact of psychological illness. However, this research has yielded equivocal results, and more thorough research is needed to determine how psychological status pre-surgery impacts weight loss and other post-surgery outcomes. The field of Positive Psychology seems well-suited to address this gap. There is a large body of research which shows that characteristics of psychological resilience such as optimism, gratitude, and meaning in life, etc. are related to positive mental and physical health outcomes. This more general body of literature provides a rationale for exploring the potentially positive impact of resilience on bariatric outcomes and the mechanisms by which positive outcomes are mediated. The ultimate goal of such research would be the development of strengths-based psychological interventions designed to maximize well-being in patients prior to surgery. The current presentation will provide an overview of the research on psychological resilience and physical and mental health as well as the potential application of this paradigm to the bariatric population.