

Pediatricians' perceptions of bariatric surgery for adolescents living with severe obesity

Biagina-Carla Farnesi^{1,2}, Kim L. Lavoie^{1,3}, Laurent Legault⁴, Rosemary Reilly², Simon L. Bacon^{1,2}

¹Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux du Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal; ²Concordia University, Montreal; ³ Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), Montreal ; ⁴ McGill University Health Center, Montreal

The use of bariatric surgery among adolescents is a contentious issue, with studies demonstrating a majority of primary care providers against referral for surgery. Given that pediatricians are often an access point for medical care, the purpose of this study was to explore pediatricians' perceptions on the use of bariatric surgery as a treatment option for adolescents living with severe obesity and what factors they consider when deciding whether to refer. Actively practising Quebec-based pediatricians (n=7) were recruited, through general advertisement, to participate in semi-structured interviews. Participants worked in community and academic settings, had a range of professional experience (6 to 40 years) and patient caseloads with obesity (>10% to 100%). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Inductive thematic analysis was used to identify emerging themes and patterns. Four preliminary themes were identified: (1) bariatric surgery was perceived as acceptable only as a last resort; (2) pediatricians were comfortable referring to a multi-disciplinary team for further assessment but not directly to a surgeon; (3) for surgery to be considered the patient had to reach physical maturation, however there were debates about what this meant for boys due to completing puberty at a later age (past 18 years old); and (4) decisional capacity of adolescents to consent for bariatric surgery was not perceived as problematic unless there was cognitive impairment. Findings from the study demonstrate that pediatricians are open to the potential role bariatric surgery could play, but the conditions under which such a referral would be made varied by individuals.