

Title: Voices from the hinterland Part 2: Local challenges of bariatric surgery management

Fergal O'Hagan, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>, Geoffrey S. Navara, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>, Danielle Sage<sup>1</sup>

1. Department of Psychology, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario

**Background:** In Ontario, multidisciplinary surgical centres in urban centres (Centres of Excellence) provide medical, dietetic and psychosocial care leading up to and following bariatric surgery. Patients remote from the Centres rely on the day-to-day support of local health care teams and consultants for decision-making and care in the pre and post-operative periods during a time of significant physiological, psychological and social adaptation. Formal research examining the experience of local health providers in supporting this emergent patient population is lacking.

**Objective:** To understand the challenges of bariatric care for health care providers remote from the Centres of Excellence.

**Methods:** Qualitative method using focus group and interview data from local family health team professionals. Transcribed data were analyzed using progressive coding focusing on the process of care and barriers and facilitators encountered by providers.

**Results:** Participants (physicians, dieticians, mental health professionals) viewed bariatric surgery as an effective intervention although they acknowledged reluctance among some in the practice community towards bariatric surgery as an "easy out" for patients. Participants discussed the importance of integrated, local support for patients through the surgical process, postoperative period and longer term. Specific challenges were identified in referral processes, dealing with post-surgical complications and adherence to eating plans and shifting long-standing eating patterns in the patient's usual environment.

**Discussion:** In small centres, challenges exist in supporting patient decision-making, adherence and managing surgical complications. Technical support from Centres of Excellence is valued; however, distributed expertise to support long-term weight loss would be useful in day-to-day care.