

What effect does attendance in support groups have on BMI following Lap Band bariatric surgery?

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Abstract

Obesity is common, serious and costly. In the United States, approximately one-third of the population (78 million individuals), meets the criteria to be classified as obese, impacting both the morbidity and mortality for these individuals. Obesity is a life-threatening disease associated with higher rates of type two diabetes, coronary artery disease, stroke, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, and cancer.

In addition to the impact on health, obesity contributes to both long-term and financial ramifications for both the individual living and healthcare systems. The American health care system spends an estimated \$147 billion dollars annually on obesity related illnesses.

One intervention emerging as an alternative in the treatment of obesity includes surgical interventions. The literature supports, in conjunction with the surgery, lifestyle changes such as diet, exercise and medical follow-up are necessary following bariatric surgery in order to sustain long-term health. Strong and sustained social support may also play a role in managing weight loss and lifestyle change, though few studies have explored the role of social support in weight loss management.

Purpose

Patients receive education prior to surgery about the importance of social support following surgery. Having a support system in place is vital for weight loss success and emotional health.

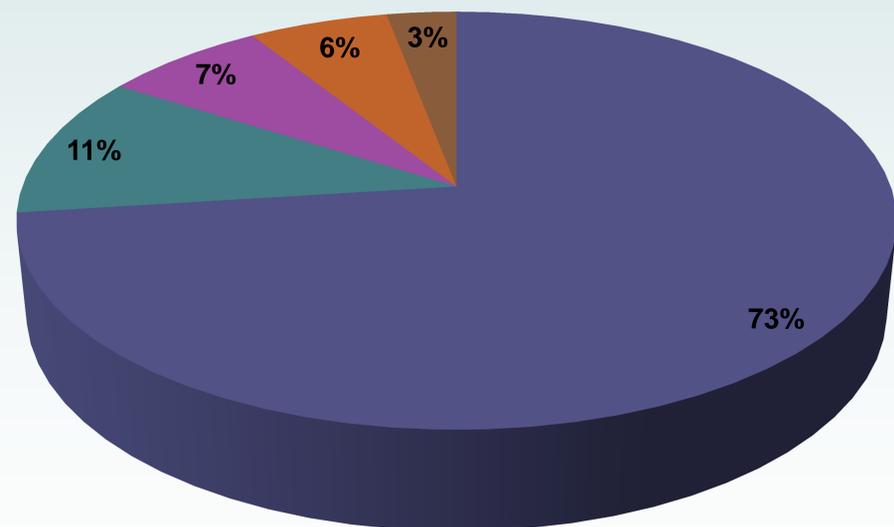
Our organization offers monthly bariatric support group meetings. Exploring utilization of the support group and subsequent outcomes lead us to the burning question of: **What effect does attendance in support groups have on BMI following Lap Band bariatric surgery?**

Methods

This retrospective study consisted of patients who underwent bariatric lap band surgery between June 2008 and May 2009 (n=121). Data collection included the patients' weights and BMI which were recorded approximately two weeks prior to surgery and again approximately one year following surgery. Demographic variables of age, sex and race were also recorded. Support group meeting attendance up to one year post surgery was documented.

ANOVA and Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test were the main statistical methods used to check the impact of demographic predictors and number of support group sessions attended on mean weight loss.

Meetings Attended



■ No Meetings ■ 1 Meeting ■ 2-3 Meetings ■ 4-5 Meetings ■ 7-15 Meetings

Results

For this sample, we did not observe a significant relationship between the number of support group meetings attended by patients and weight loss (reduction in BMI), nor did we find that age, sex, or race were contributing factors in such a relationship. We did observe that the mean weight loss for African Americans compared to Caucasians was slightly smaller (45.2 pounds vs. 49.3 pounds), and mean weight loss for women as compared to men was slightly smaller (47.6 pounds vs. 55.7 pounds), but these differences did not become statistically significant (t-test p-value > .10). However, a Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test revealed that the median number of support group sessions attended by Caucasian patients was significantly larger as compared to African American patients (3 vs. 1, one-sided p-value = .035). We did not find that one gender was more likely to attend support group meetings than another. Since this was a retrospective study, our sample size might not have been large enough to make some of the results statistically significant. Also, a very large proportion of patients (73%) did not attend any support group meetings, and did not show significant association between BMI and number of support group meetings attended.

Discussion

Bariatric surgery patients are highly encouraged to attend support group meetings both before and after surgery. Although the literature supports not only life style changes and social support for continued success, in our study for our patient population, we discovered live, face-to-face meetings may not be the most optimal form of support post surgery.

Nursing Implications

In the quest for success following bariatric surgery, additional support options need to be explored and researched.