Post-bariatric support group attendance and long-term weight loss outcomes

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Background

Many bariatric or weigh-loss surgery (WLS) programs run post-WLS support groups, but to our knowledge, their efficacy has not been prospectively evaluated, and selection factors greatly compromise our ability to do so with data drawn from non-randomized treatments.

One study tracked participants prospectively and determined that patients who attended more follow-up visits (with the surgeon or nurse practitioner) had better weight loss outcomes (Shen et al., 2004), supporting the notion that more intensive post-WLS intervention might further optimize outcomes.

Another study with relatively short-term follow-up (15 mos; Hildebrandt, 1998) observed a nonsignificant trend for support group attendees to lose more weight than non-attendees, but among attenders, the more often patients attended groups, the more weight they lost.

Two retrospective studies observed that those who attend support groups had better weight loss outcomes up through 1-yr post-WLS (Elakkary et al., 2006; Song et al., 2008).

To our knowledge, no study has examined the longer-term WLS outcomes for those who did versus did not attend peri- and/or post-WLS support groups.

Hypothesis

We hypothesized that long-term outcomes would mirror those observed by studies with short-term follow-up in that group attenders would demonstrate improved weight loss outcomes.

Participants

- 418 post-WLS patients
- Mean of 7.7 yrs post-WLS surgery
- 86.2% Roux-en-y gastric bypass
- 80.2% female; mean of 48.3 yrs old at surgery
- 87.5% Excess Weight Loss (%EWL) at nadir; 66.5%EWL current (based on ideal BMI=25)

Method

Patients completed a survey via mail, online, or telephone that assessed a host of variables including current and lowest BMI, medical comorbidities, body satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, substance abuse, emotional problems, and pre- and post-WLS support group attendance.

Results

Support group attendance was not associated with psychosocial or other medical outcomes beyond weight loss.

Results - continued

We observed worse long-term weight loss outcomes for support group attendees, relative to those who did not attend support groups. Our long-term follow-up data conflicts with results found by studies that observed better outcomes at shorter follow-up periods (Elakkary et al., 2006; Hildebrandt, 1998; Song et al., 2008).

Selection factors may play a role in who attends support groups; in our case, those who attended support groups were likely those with complex clinical presentations that attenuated their chances of successful outcomes. In support of this, support group attendees had higher pre-WLS BMI, a well-documented predictor of poor long-term weight loss outcomes. Results suggest that support group attendance may be an indicator of a need for even more intensive services to achieve optimal post-WLS weight loss outcomes.

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References Cited


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