

## RESEARCH NEWS



## Suicide screening should be given to patients who have bariatric surgery, study recommends

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Patients undergoing bariatric surgery should be screened for suicide risk and given more mental health support, researchers say, after a study published in *JAMA Surgery* showed that self harm emergencies increased by 50% after surgery.

The study<sup>1</sup> followed 8815 adults from Ontario, Canada, for three years before they underwent bariatric surgery and for three years after. The cohort was 80% women and had a mean age of 42. A total of 111 patients had 158 self harm emergencies during the study: 62 events in the period before surgery and 96 after surgery. Nearly all events occurred in patients with a history of mental health disorder. The most common self harm mechanism was intentional overdose.

The overall rate of self harm emergencies was 3.63 per 1000 patient years after surgery, compared with 2.33 per 1000 patient years before surgery (rate ratio 1.54 (95% confidence interval 1.03 to 2.30); P=0.007). This compared with a baseline population rate in Ontario of 1.2 per 1000 person years.

Most of the self harm emergencies occurred in the second and third postoperative years. The researchers noted that postoperative care usually involves multiple visits during the first year and less frequent contact in subsequent years. They said that the period for mental health support may need to be longer for some patients.

In an accompanying editorial Amir Ghaferi and Carol Lindsay-Westphal, of the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System in

Michigan, USA, wrote that the study underscored the unique vulnerability of patients undergoing bariatric surgery.<sup>2</sup>

“Most programs focus on the first postoperative year when most weight loss occurs,” they wrote. “However, this study provides data to support the call for long term follow-up in bariatric surgery, especially for patients with a history of major depressive disorder and/or self harm.”



- 1 Bhatti J, Nathens A, Thiruchelvam D, et al. Self harm emergencies after bariatric surgery: a population based cohort study. *JAMA Surg* Oct 2015, doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2015.3414.
- 2 Ghaferi A, Lindsay-Westphal C. Bariatric surgery—more than just an operation. *JAMA Surg* Oct 2015, doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2015.3396.

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