

Bariatric Surgery is not cosmetic, but a lifesaver

30 March 2020 | Views | By Dr Manish Khaitan

Obesity is a Disease, know Your treatment options and how campaigns #IndiaFightsObesity and #FitIndiaMovement play a key role



India, which has the second largest population of more than 1.3 billion people, is also home to the third highest number of people suffering from obesity in the world after USA and China. Recent decades have seen a rapid increase in levels of obesity in India.

Recognizing and understanding the disease, along with being aware of the treatment options are key to tackling obesity.

Obesity is a complex disease and not a cosmetic issue. There is an intricate play of genetics, hormones, diet and lifestyle. The primary goal of obesity treatment is to achieve and maintain optimal weight. Exercise and diet modification are crucial for the management; However, for morbidly obese patients these interventions are insufficient, bariatric and metabolic surgery have emerged as a valid option for treatment of clinically severe obesity.

Despite the clinical evidence for bariatric surgery, surprisingly less than 1% eligible patients undergo bariatric surgery. The reason being the poor understanding of the procedure guidelines and who is eligible to undergo the surgery.

In this regard, Obesity and Metabolic Surgery Society of India (OSSI) released its first position statement in 2013, to establish that bariatric/metabolic surgery is not a “cosmetic surgery”, but a “life-saving” one. Dr Aparna Govil Bhasker and Dr Praveen Raj, along with OSSI leadership, took a lead in preparing this draft as future guidelines for obesity treatment in India. In recent publication from OSSI in 2020, it is clearly laid out that “bariatric/metabolic surgery should be considered a treatment option for acceptable Indian patients with a BMI \geq 35 kg/m² , with/without presence of any obesity related co-morbidity” and “Bariatric/metabolic surgery should be considered a treatment option for acceptable Indian patients with a BMI \geq 30 kg/m² , in presence of two or more obesity related comorbidities”.

These latest guidelines will help medical fraternity and society to better define the checks and balances for patient care. It is also critical to drive patient awareness on obesity and educate them on the right scientific treatment options. In this context, social media campaigns #IndiaFightsObesity and #FitIndiaMovement play a key role. All stakeholders, ranging from policy, government, hospitals and NGOs need to play a vital role in winning the war against obesity.