

Current status of Bariatric surgery in Korea

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Obesity is not only a health problem in western countries, but also in Korea. According to 2009 Korean National Health & Nutrition Examination Survey (KNHANES), prevalence of obesity in adults was 32.4% which is a big change over the last 10 years. More alarming is the problem of children and adolescent. From 2003 to 2009, number of bariatric procedures was increased in 622%.

All surgeries were performed through laparoscopic procedures. 63.3% adjustable gastric bandings, 12.6% gastric sleeve resections, 5.9% VBGs (with or without sleeve resection) were the restrictive operations performed. 12.0% Roux-en-Y gastric bypass, 12.6% Mini-gastric bypass, 2.6% Duodeno-jejunal Bypass were the malabsorptive (both restrictive) procedures since 2003.

Based on the statistics, the surgeon were performed in most hospitals when the BMI was over 35kg/m² while more than 2 significant obesity related co-morbidities were found with BMI over 30kg/m². Currently the bariatric surgery in Korea is still at a developing level, and has not been performed very much compared with the number of patients who need it.

As the bariatric surgery will gain more important as the number of obesity people increases every day, physicians need to make more efforts to help the public to have correct understanding about the bariatric surgery. Insurance coverage is another concern in my country because bariatric surgery is not covered by National Health Insurance in Korea. So, it became an expensive surgery, not accessible for everybody. As obese people are often from middle to lower socioeconomic class, access to surgery is very limited. As these people are in need, we have to raise our voice about reimbursement for bariatric patients.