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Using patient focus groups and interviews to inform a prospective cohort study: A protocol for investigating obesity surgery in Tasmania:

Category: Outcomes from Bariatric Surgery

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Purpose The effectiveness of bariatric surgery for morbid obesity in the short-term has been well established. Less is known about longer-term outcomes, including health-related quality of life (QoL) and societal costs, and how these compare for surgery candidates who remain on surgery waitlists or who choose not to proceed with surgery. Addressing these knowledge gaps would guide decisions around allocation of resources and service provision in Australian public and private healthcare sectors. The INvestigating obEsity Surgery in Tasmania (INVEST) project is a partnership between Tasmanian policy makers, clinicians and researchers using a program of qualitative and quantitative work to better understand patient experiences, treatment pathways, service use, costs, and longer-term health and QoL outcomes.

Methods/Design A series of qualitative investigations informed the survey design of the cohort study. Focus groups with surgery candidates and recipients explored patient expectations, experiences, QoL and factors influencing patient treatment pathways. A longitudinal qualitative study comprised pre-and post-surgery interviews with publicly funded surgery recipients following extended wait times for surgery. Interviews with GPs explored the role of primary care in the referral pathway. For the prospective cohort study, 400 public and private surgery candidates will be consecutively recruited. Participants will be surveyed biannually for three years (2016-2019) during which time they will remain wait-listed, have surgery, or decide against surgery. Cohort outcomes include obesity-specific and general QoL measurements, productivity, and impact on social eating. Direct and indirect costs will be measured using patient-report cost diaries, and, with consent, these data linked to health-service use data obtained from Medicare and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme records.

Conclusions The use of qualitative, quantitative and data linkage methods in the INVEST study will identify and quantify key and novel outcomes for surgery candidates and recipients, informing treatment of morbidly obese patients in public and private health systems.

