

Bariatric surgery is the new ‘metabolic surgery’ and is the future of laparoscopic upper gastrointestinal surgery

‘There are no surgical or medical diseases: there are just conditions and treatments’.

So said Henry Buchwald in his Presidential Address at the American Society of Bariatric Surgeons in 2004. Obesity is the healthcare epidemic of the 21st century, and surgery is the only effective treatment for it.

Surgery actually returns morbidly obese people to a health weight. It puts their diabetes into remission, gets them off anti-hypertensives and returns their quality of life to normal. There are few, if any, more cost effective therapeutic interventions (just consider the cost burden of type 2 diabetes to the NHS as the obesity epidemic continues to worsen).

‘If there would be 1 pill that keeps weight down and resolves type 2 DM (and other comorbidities) for at least 15-20 years, with low morbidity and mortality and impressive decrease in long term mortality, its inventor would probably deserve a Nobel prize!’

Chilean surgeon Ricardo Cohen said this at the Diabetes Surgery Summit in Rome in 2007 where the concept of ‘metabolic surgery’ was borne – indeed the American Society of Bariatric Surgery in 2007 changed its name to American Society of *Metabolic* and Bariatric Surgery to reflect the positive public health benefits of surgery.

In the USA in 2006 there were more bariatric procedures than cholecystectomies, and the UK will see the same explosion of surgery in the next 10 years. Who is going to do this advanced laparoscopic surgery? The answer is – any ALS trainee who realises that this is the direction that surgery is going in and wishes to learn advanced laparoscopic skills – get started now!

The specialty is technically challenging with fantastic results and extremely grateful patients. It’s quite likely that newly diagnosed diabetics will be offered metabolic surgery (eg duodeno-jejunal bypass) in the next fews, and you have the opportunity to develop this specialty. We are only scratching at the tip of the iceberg of the population who could benefit, and we are the most obese population in Europe.

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