Hospital Services
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24 May 2022

████████████████████

Dear ████

Re: OIA request – Weight-loss/bariatric surgery

Thank you for your Official Information Act request received 3 May seeking information from Waitematā District Health Board (DHB) about our bariatric service.

Before responding to your specific questions, it may be useful to provide some context about our services.

Waitematā is the largest and one of the most rapidly growing DHBs in the country, serving a population of around 650,000 across the North Shore, Waitakere and Rodney areas. We are the largest employer in the district, employing more than 8,900 people across more than 80 locations.

In addition to providing care to our own resident population, we are the Northern Region provider of forensic mental health services and child rehabilitation services, plus the metro Auckland provider of child community dental services and community alcohol and drug services.

You have requested:
I would like to be provided with the exact criteria for weight loss surgery for Waitematā DHB and whether having a BMI (body mass index) over 40 is enough to be referred without an obesity related disease, the current average waiting time for bariatric surgery once referred to the DHB process by a GP and how many people have been given bariatric surgery without a severe obesity-related disease in the past year.

In response to your request, we are able to provide the following information:

1. **Exact criteria for weight loss surgery for Waitematā DHB and whether having a BMI over 40 is enough to be referred without an obesity-related disease**

Obesity is defined by the World Organise (WHO) as a disease. Waitematā DHB will consider patients for surgery if they:
- have a BMI of 40 or more
- have a BMI of 35 or higher and have other obesity-related severe diseases that could be improved, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes or obstructive sleep apnoea
- have previously failed attempts to lose weight
- understand what the surgery involves, what to expect before and afterwards and are committed to a permanent lifestyle change (diet and exercise).

However, we are currently unable to take new patients due to the impact that COVID-19 has had on hospital services and the need to defer elective surgery so that we could treat patients with COVID-19. As a result, we are prioritising treatment to patients who are already on the waiting list for bariatric surgery, unless there is an urgent requirement for them to be accepted.

2. How many people have been given the bariatric surgery without a severe obesity-related disease in the past year.

During 2021, 77 people had bariatric surgery, with most of those occurring earlier in the year. Since 1 January to 30 April 2022 we have performed two bariatric surgeries. We are of the opinion that morbid obesity is a severe disease with reduced lifespan and reduced quality-of-life. Therefore, all 77 people receiving bariatric surgery at Waitematā DHB last year are classed as having a severe obesity-related disease.

3. Current average waiting time for bariatric surgery once referred to the DHB process by a general practitioner.
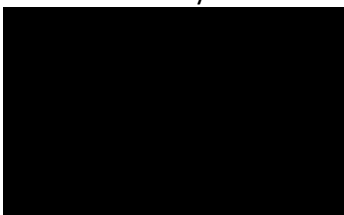
Currently, the waiting time for surgery can be up to two years. In some situations, to meet the criteria for surgery, the person has to reach a goal weight (i.e. lose weight) in order to lower the risk for serious surgery-related complications. Therefore, the time to surgery is partially dependant on this, so will vary from person-to-person.

I trust that this information is helpful.

Waitematā DHB supports the open disclosure of information to assist community understanding of how we are delivering publicly funded healthcare. This includes the proactive publication of anonymised Official Information Act responses on our website from 10 working days after they have been released.

If you consider there are good reasons why this response should not be made publicly available, we will be happy to consider your views.

Yours sincerely

Executive Director Hospital Services
Waitematā District Health Board