Cost-effectiveness of Bariatric Surgery in Adolescents with Obesity

In the United States, more than one-third of children are affected by overweight and obesity. While behavioural interventions to treat obesity are often used as the first-line treatment for adolescents, they only rarely lead to meaningful long-term weight loss in the population. Given these results, bariatric surgery is increasingly being considered as an option for adolescents for whom weight loss through non-surgical treatments was unsuccessful. The Teen-Longitudinal Assessment of Bariatric Surgery (Teen-LABS) study found that total body weight decreased by 27% at 3 years after surgery. Following this trial, the objective of this study was “to assess the cost-effectiveness of bariatric surgery for adolescents with obesity using recently published results from the Teen-LABS study.”

The researchers “developed a cohort state-transition model to assess the cost-effectiveness of two strategies: no surgery and bariatric surgery.” Overall, the analyses highlighted the “potential value of bariatric surgery for treating adolescents with severe obesity.” Indeed, while the cost-effectiveness was not demonstrated over a 3-year time horizon, it has the potential to become cost-effective over a 5-year time horizon. Consequently, the results stress the need to conduct longer-term studies. While bariatric surgery would have a limited impact on the prevalence of obesity on a population level, from an individual perspective bariatric surgery can result in “life-altering weight loss, which not only leads to the resolution and prevention of disease, but also allows patients to avoid the stigma, bullying, and isolation that often accompany severe obesity.”