

More Overweight Singaporeans Turning To Surgery As Obesity Rate Reaches All-Time High

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According to the World Health Organisation, obesity has reached epidemic proportions globally, with more than **1 billion** adults overweight and at least **300 million** clinically obese.

Here in Singapore to discuss this burgeoning problem is Professor Paul Edmond O'Brien, Director of the Australian Centre for Obesity Research and Education (CORE) and a world-renowned expert in weight research and management.

Among his areas of interest are: obesity and its effects on health, benefits of weight loss on health and quality of life; and techniques of achieving weight loss.

Obesity is a serious problem in Prof O'Brien's hometown Australia.

Recent studies show that **47%** of Australian women and **63%** of Australian men are overweight or obese. According to Nutrition Australia (2000), Australians are at the point where it is almost more "normal" to have a weight problem than not.

If the current trend continues, it is estimated that by 2010, **70%** of Australians will be above their healthy weight range.

Prof O'Brien's visit is very relevant to Singapore, given the rising trend of obesity among Singapore adults.

According to the recent National Health Survey, the proportion of obese adults aged 18 to 69 years was **6.9%** in **2004**.

With the recent adjustment of BMI cut-offs to define risks in Asian populations, the number of Singaporean falling into "overweight" (moderate risk) and "obese" (high risk) categories is now doubled.

An astounding **35%** of adults between 18 and 69 years are now overweight (with BMI between 23kg/m² and 27.5kg/m²), and **14%** of adults are now obese (with BMI more than 27.5kg/m²).

Singaporeans have been found to be at risk of developing heart disease and diabetes at BMI values of 23 kg/m² and above.

Obese people are also likely to suffer from gout, a painful joint disease caused by high levels of uric acid in the blood.

There are also social and emotional repercussions.

As society today places more emphasis on physical appearances, obese or overweight people tend to feel rejected and undesirable. They may face prejudice or discrimination at the workplace and may have trouble finding jobs.

Faced with such pressing health concerns and the need for greater social acceptance, more obese Singaporeans are turning to surgery to help them shed the pounds.

Last year (2004) alone, more than **100** men and women have gone for Bariatric Surgery - a procedure to reduce the stomach capacity and eliminate feelings of hunger so as to reduce the amount of food consumed.

This is a **2-fold** jump from the year before (2003), where about **40** people turn to their surgeons for help, and a **10-fold** jump from previous years where numbers average **10** a year.

Raffles Hospital's Consultant Surgeon Dr Baladas H G says surgery is gaining popularity because the long-term success rate of diet and exercise in severe obesity has been found to be dismal, just **2-5%**.

Their problem lies in their low metabolism and one surefire way to overcoming this is surgery of the stomach or intestines to help reduce food intake or absorption.

This way, weight loss is tremendous - ranging from 20kg to over 100kg - and there is a long-term success rate of over **95%**.

Dr Baladas, who has the distinction of performing the largest cluster of successful weight loss surgeries in this region, has had patients who have halved their weight and are now leading healthy, happy and fulfilling lives.

At the press conference on Friday 10 June 2005, guest specialist Professor Paul O'Brien will be at Raffles Hospital to share the latest trends and research on the Global Obesity Epidemic.

Local weight loss expert Dr Baladas Haridas will shed light on the Singapore situation and what Singaporeans are doing in a bid to lose weight.

Dr Baladas is one of the leading authorities on weight loss management in Singapore and region, having the distinction of carrying out the largest cluster of lap band surgery in this region, having completed more than 200 cases to date.

Raffles Hospital will also announce its new Bariatric Surgery Programme and the opening of its new Weight Management Centre.

For more information, please contact Ms Liang Hwee Ting, Corporate Communications Manager, at 6311 1312 or Mr Jason Lim, Corporate Communications Executive, at 6311 1332.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Professor Paul Edmond O'Brien
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Professor Paul O'Brien is the director of CORE. His areas of expertise include: the morbidity of obesity and the health benefits of weight loss; laparoscopic adjustable gastric banding procedures; treatments for obesity and their relative effectiveness; effects of obesity and weight loss on survival.

Currently, Prof O'Brien is also the Emeritus Professor of Surgery at Monash University, Melbourne.

Prof O'Brien graduated with honours from Monash University in 1967 and obtained his fellowship in Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in 1972. He received his Doctor of Medicine from Monash University in 1979.

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MBBS (S'pore), FRCS (Edin), FRCS (Glas)

Dr Baladas H G is a Consultant General & Laparoscopic Bariatric Surgeon at Raffles Hospital.

Dr Baladas graduated from the National University of Singapore in 1988 and obtained his fellowship in Surgery in 1994 from the Royal Colleges of Edinburgh and Glasgow. He was awarded a scholarship in Laparoscopic Surgery in Australia from 1999 to 2000.

Dr Baladas has since performed an impressive number of highly specialised laparoscopic procedures. He is well-known for laparoscopic gastric banding for severe obesity and has been invited to preceptor many surgeons locally and in the region.