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## **Patients and Primary Care Physicians Aren't Having Candid Conversations About Obesity and Weight-loss Surgery, Survey Finds**

### *Misperceptions and Fear of Embarrassment Inhibit Discussion of Treatment Options That Would Benefit Many Patients with Obesity*

Cincinnati, OH – June 13, 2011 – Significant barriers are keeping adults affected by obesity<sup>a</sup> and physicians<sup>b</sup> from talking frankly about bariatric, or weight loss, surgery, a new survey sponsored by the Obesity Action Coalition and Ethicon Endo-Surgery shows.

The survey found that while four in five adults affected by obesity had discussed weight with their health care provider,<sup>1</sup> only one in 10 who meet the National Institutes of Health guidelines for bariatric surgery have had their doctor recommend it.<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted online in March and April 2011 by Harris Interactive among 400 U.S. adults affected by obesity, 252 U.S. adults who have undergone bariatric surgery<sup>1</sup> and 495 physicians.<sup>2</sup>

Results indicate that the majority of patients (86%) who had surgery wish they'd had it sooner,<sup>1</sup> and half of physicians echo this sentiment, wishing they had suggested it sooner to some of their patients.<sup>2</sup>

“Healthcare professionals should be having detailed discussions with people suffering from obesity about all their treatment options, including weight-loss surgery,” said Joe Nadglowski, President and Chief Executive Officer, Obesity Action Coalition. “The survey results indicate that doctors are not speaking to patients about their weight and the effects it can have on their health. Informed patients can proactively manage their health and improve their quality of life.”

According to the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery and other national medical associations, bariatric surgery is the most effective therapy available for morbid obesity and can result in improvement or complete resolution of obesity comorbidities.<sup>3</sup>

The health care professionals surveyed tend to underestimate patients' willingness to discuss their weight and their receptiveness to discuss treatment options, such as bariatric surgery. Six in 10 physicians surveyed believe most individuals affected by obesity are too embarrassed to discuss their weight with a health care professional.<sup>2</sup> However, almost 3 in 4 patients who have had weight-loss surgery and more than 4 in 5 adults who haven't, reported they have not been too embarrassed, suggesting the conversation would be welcomed.<sup>1</sup> Further, of those bariatric surgery patients whose health care provider suggested surgery, 9 in 10 (92%) felt positive feelings (i.e., excited, relieved, happy) as a result of their suggestion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Defined as U.S. adults 18+ who have a BMI 35+ with at least one obesity related comorbidity or BMI 40+.

<sup>b</sup> PCPs and OB/GYNs were interviewed.

## **Fear of bariatric surgery leads to prolonged research, delaying action**

The top perceived drawback of bariatric surgery for individuals affected by obesity is the misplaced fear that it is dangerous (59%).<sup>1</sup> Physicians share this concern, with eight of 10 reporting fear of surgery complications as one of the biggest barriers.<sup>2</sup>

“It is important to stress that while there are risks involved - as with any surgical procedure - bariatric surgery is considered a safe option,” said Dr. Christopher Still, Director of the Geisinger Obesity Institute, Medical Director, Center for Nutrition and Weight Management, and OAC Board Member.<sup>c</sup> “In fact, when performed at a Center of Excellence, bariatric surgery is as safe or safer than many commonly performed procedures, such as gall bladder removal or hip replacement.”<sup>4,5,6</sup>

Patients who have had bariatric surgery spent a vast amount of time researching it, researching online for an average of three years before making the decision to have surgery.<sup>1</sup> They spent on average eight hours per week searching for information - translating to an average of 1,211<sup>d</sup> hours.<sup>1</sup> While there are many factors to consider before having surgery, this prolonged period of independent research could delay conversations which most of those surveyed wish would come sooner. Further, the majority of patients who have undergone weight loss surgery believe that their lives have changed for the better,<sup>1</sup> evidenced by the fact that three-quarters cite excellent or good health.<sup>1</sup>

### **OAC and EES offer online Q&A session: [www.LetsTalkObesity.com](http://www.LetsTalkObesity.com)**

The Obesity Action Coalition and Ethicon Endo-Surgery, the company offering the REALIZE<sup>®</sup> Solution, are providing individuals with questions about bariatric surgery the opportunity to participate in a live online Q&A session. The 2 hour session will be hosted by bariatric surgeon Dr. Lloyd Stegemann, of the Texas Center For Medical and Surgical Weight Loss and takes place from 7-9pm ET on June 13, 2011 at [www.LetsTalkObesity.com](http://www.LetsTalkObesity.com). Joe Nadglowski of the Obesity Action Coalition will moderate the session.

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### **Survey Methodology**

This bariatric surgery study was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of Ethicon Endo-Surgery and the Obesity Action Coalition between March 15 – April 6, 2011 among 400 U.S. adults age 18+, affected by obesity and 252 U.S. adults who reported undergoing bariatric surgery at some point in the past.<sup>1</sup> The bariatric surgery study also surveyed 495 physicians practicing in the U.S. — 241 Primary Care Physicians and 254 OB/GYNs.<sup>2</sup> A full methodology, including weighting variables, is available.

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<sup>c</sup> Dr. Still is a consultant for Ethicon Endo-Surgery.

<sup>d</sup> Total number of hours was calculated by taking the avg # of months spent seriously considering surgery/12 months per year\*52 weeks per year\*avg # of hours per week.

## **About the Obesity Action Coalition**

The OAC is a National nonprofit charity dedicated to helping individuals affected by obesity. The OAC was formed to bring together individuals struggling with weight issues and provide educational resources and advocacy tools. In 2011, the OAC launched a national Membership Drive to recruit 50,000 members to strengthen its advocacy efforts and raise awareness of the disease of obesity. For more information on OAC Membership, please visit [www.obesityaction.org](http://www.obesityaction.org).

## **About Ethicon Endo-Surgery**

Ethicon Endo-Surgery develops and markets advanced medical devices for minimally invasive and open surgical procedures, focusing on procedure-enabling devices for the interventional diagnosis and treatment of conditions in general and bariatric surgery, as well as gastrointestinal health, gynecology and surgical oncology. More information can be found at [www.ethiconendosurgery.com](http://www.ethiconendosurgery.com).

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## References

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