Self-management and perspectives on mHealth: A qualitative study of patients undergoing bariatric surgery

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Aim: We aimed to explore the perspectives of adults who have undergone bariatric surgery, regarding their experiences of self-management, strategies used and acceptability of mHealth.

Methods: This qualitative study utilised semi-structured interviews and inductive content analysis. Participants were recruited from bariatric surgery outpatient clinics at the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital.

Results: Participants comprised 15 individuals (mean age 57 ± 7.4 years, 60% female) with a mean total weight loss of 21 ± 7.4% and mean months post-surgery of 15 ± 7.1. Thematic categories identified from the data can be seen in Figure 1.

Conclusion: Adults who have undergone bariatric surgery are using technology as a self-management strategy. These patients seemed accepting of mHealth and optimistic about its integration into usual service delivery. Understanding self-management strategies and patient interactions with technology provides a basis for future patient-centred intervention development.

Figure 1: Thematic category results

- **Attributing success to resources**
  - Patients found it easy to follow guidelines and appreciated staff support to implement strategies.

- **Motivated and able to independently access digital health**
  - Patients used wearables and apps to track goals and monitor behaviour, used online technologies to seek information or, alternatively, had limited use for digital health.

- **Turning to Online Health Communities**
  - Patients commonly sought support and sense of community however, were cautious of advice given.

- **Seeing a place for mHealth in service delivery**
  - Patients adapted to the new online world as a result of COVID-19 and felt mHealth utilisation and integration into usual practice would be beneficial.

- **Future vision for healthcare delivery**
  - Patients felt post-bariatric care could offer more support, information, and resources and health professionals could discuss side-effects more, especially if considered taboo.