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Bariatric surgery must balance medical needs, Islamic values'

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'Bariatric surgery must balance medical needs, Islamic values'

KOTAKINABALU: Three medical specialists have called for greater awareness of bariatric surgery within an Islamic framework, stressing that the procedure may be both medically necessary and religiously permissible when it serves to preserve life and health.

General surgeon Dr Syaza Zainudin of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), consultant bariatric surgeon Dr Mat Salleh Sarif, and Assistant Professor Dr Hasbullah Mohamad from International Islamic University Malaysia said obesity has become a major public health concern both globally and in Malaysia.

They noted that worldwide obesity rates have nearly tripled since 1975, with Malaysia has recorded a steady rise.

Data from the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2019 showed obesity prevalence increasing from 15.1 per cent in 2011 to 19.7 per cent in 2019, significantly higher than the global average.

The specialists said obesity is closely associated with chronic diseases such as cardiovascular conditions, hypertension, diabetes, osteoarthritis and certain cancers, adding that national data further show a growing burden of obesity-related conditions, particularly among older adults.

"For many patients, lifestyle modification and medication alone are insufficient to achieve sustained weight loss," they said, adding that bariatric surgery has



Dr Syaza Zainudin



Dr Mat Salleh Sarif



Dr Hasbullah Mohamad

demonstrated better long-term outcomes, including improved glycaemic control and remission of Type 2 diabetes.

They also pointed out to long-term evidence showing reduced complications and mortality rates compared with conventional treatment.

However, the doctors acknowledged that bariatric surgery often raises cultural and religious concerns in Muslim-majority societies, particularly regarding its permissibility under Islamic law.

They stressed that Islamic jurisprudence emphasises the preservation of life, or 'if-al-nafs', under the broader objectives of 'maqâ'id al-sharî'ah' (Islamic law).

"Medical interventions should be assessed based on whether they bring benefit and prevent harm," they said, referring to the principle of ma-la-ah (public interest).

Within this framework, the doctors said bariatric surgery is permissible when carried out for legitimate medical reasons,

such as reducing the risk of life-threatening complications linked to severe obesity.

They cited Islamic teachings that encouraging treatment, noting that alleviating hardship and preventing harm are key legal principles supporting such interventions when advised by qualified medical professionals.

However, they cautioned that procedures performed purely for cosmetic reasons, without medical necessity, are not permissible.

On post-surgery considerations, the doctors said patients who experience excess skin following significant weight loss may be eligible for body contouring procedures if these address functional or psychological needs, including mobility issues, infection risks or mental well-being.

The doctors also addressed concerns about fasting during Ramadan after bariatric surgery, to delay fasting for at least six months to allow proper recovery.

"If fasting is to be considered earlier, it must be done under close medical supervision,"

they said, urging patients to seek personalised advice from healthcare providers.

They shared the case of a young woman who underwent sleeve gastrectomy after struggling with obesity-related infertility.

Following weight loss, she conceived naturally and was able to observe Ramadan fasting with careful medical planning and monitoring.

"This demonstrates that, with proper support, patients can balance their health needs with religious obligations," the doctors stressed.

The specialists concluded that a patient-centred and faith-sensitive approach is essential in managing obesity, combining medical evidence with respect for religious values.

"Obesity is not just a medical issue but also a social and spiritual concern.

"With accurate information and compassionate care, patients can achieve better health while remaining true to their faith," they added.