

Bariatrics and Dental Management: An Eye Opener

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Bariatrics (derived from the greek word “baros” means overweight) describes the medical treatment of serious overweight i.e. obesity. This now a days concerns nit only medicine but also dentistry. Bariatric or Overweight or Obese patients can raise sensitive issues for dental surgeons and hence, need to be dealt with in a considerate manner. Obesity can result in lifelong and intergenerational ill health. Obesity in India has reached epidemic proportions in the 21st century, with morbid obesity affecting 5% of the country's population. India is following a trend of other developing countries that are steadily becoming more obese. Whatever the statistics associated with the latest decayed, missing and filled (DMF) scores, it would seem that functionality has not been impaired for the majority of the population. It looks like a very normal thing as far as the society is concerned and pertains not only for the developed countries but also for the developing ones.

Dental chairs

Besides dentistry, talking in terms of airline industry, where the issues associated with obesity have already been the subject of discussion, such that some airlines request that more corpulent passengers purchase two seats side by side for their flight.

Such debate usually triggers an angry response from the obese passenger concerned, who may feel they have been discriminated against, whereas the airline will consider the decision to be one of fairness, allowing all passengers to travel with a similar degree of comfort.

In terms of dentistry, there is a different reason to consider the obese patient and that is from a safety angle. However, robustly constructed dental chairs may be, they also have a maximum loading weight which should be observed.

Usually, medical equipment such as operating tables, hospital beds, etc., are constructed to cope with a maximum weight of 140 kg and equipment liability insurance is invalidated beyond specified safe limits. You might want to check the loading limit for your own dental equipment.

Declining to treat a patient who exceeds the weight limit for the equipment in your surgery needs to be handled sensitively. These patients are usually injured as a result of the sudden collapse or breakage of a dental chair, so there are always at risk which should be managed properly.

What is a disability?

A person who is obese could be considered disabled, particularly if he or she has other difficulties that can be associated with and potentially compounded by obesity, such as mobility difficulties or depression.

What to do

If a patient's weight is much above the operating limit of the dental chair, it is better to refer the patient to a more specialized dental setup with well-equipped dental chair particularly to serve the bariatric patients in the best possible way. Such patients should be motivated in such a way to avoid any kind of misunderstanding or misconceptions with the dental team rather it should be taken in a more positive and cooperative manner. Dental chairs in today's scenario are very well equipped and have a provision with a weight limit of more than 200 kg, hence, suitable to cater all sorts of bariatric patients in the best possible manner.

For this approach to be effective, it is necessary to locate a facility with such equipment or raise the matter with those who commission health services in order that a suitable referral can be made.

Hence, always remember:

- Check the operating light of the chair
- Determine the weight of the patient
- Highlight safety issue, if necessary
- Make a referral to a clinical setup which is more suitably equipped as required.

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