



Study reveals morbid obesity a significant risk factor for infection, surgical revision and death in total knee replacements

By Michael H. Weier • September 29, 2014

We have all seen the news reports: Obesity continues to be a chronic, perennial problem in the United States.¹ Up to 35 percent of American adults are deemed significantly overweight.²

A study reported in the September 17, 2014, issue of the *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*³ reveals alarming health risks for morbidly obese⁴ patients who undergo total knee replacement surgery. The Mayo Clinic⁵ physicians who conducted the study declare morbidly obese total knee replacement patients are more than five times likely to suffer infection and nearly three times as likely to require surgical revision. Moreover, the study results show the ten-year rate of fatality is more than thirty-three percent higher for the significantly overweight patient.

If the morbidly obese claimant does not lose weight prior to undergoing total knee replacement surgery, then the claims examiner is well-advised to adjust reserves. Elevated risks of infection, surgical revision and post-surgical fatality for the morbidly obese surgical patient will undoubtedly increase claims costs. ■



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¹ Esposito, Lisa, Is Health Care Improving for Obese Patients?, *U.S. News & World Report*, 9/18/2014; The State of Obesity in the United States, *Insurance Journal*, 9/11/2014; Adult Obesity is 'Unacceptably High,' Report Finds, *Yahoo! News*, 9/04/2014; Fox, Maggie, Heavyburden (sic): Obesity May Be Even Deadlier Than Thought, *NBC News*, 8/15/2013; Brown, Maureen, Most Americans May Be Obese by 2030, *ABC News Medical Unit*, 9/18, 2012.

² Ogden, Cynthia, et al., *JAMA* 2014; 311(8): 806-814, Prevalence of Childhood and Adult Obesity in the United States, 2011-1022; NCHS Data Brief No. 50, Dec. 2010, Obesity and Socioeconomic Status in Adults; McCarthy, Justin, In U.S., Adult Obesity Rate, *Gallup*, 9/26/2014.

³ Watts, Chad D., et al, Morbid Obesity: A Significant Risk Factor for Failure of Two-Stage Revision Total Knee Arthroplasty for Infection, *J Bone Joint Surg Am* 2014; 96:e145.

⁴ Morbid Obesity is defined as a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 40 or greater.

⁵ Departments of Orthopedic Surgery and Internal Medicine, Division of Infectious Diseases.

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