



Consensus Statements and Bariatric Surgery

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Dear Editor,

Consensus statements have lately become very popular. They reflect the unified views of a group of recognised experts on debatable clinical aspects, where it is not possible to make any evidence-based recommendations. Bariatric surgeons also rely on expert consensus statements to inform their practice [1–12].

Consensus statements aim to converge and unify opinions. However, it is worth noting that convergence to the correct alternative is not guaranteed if correct procedures are not followed and, sometimes, even if they are. There is always a chance that the consensus leads to an incorrect convergence and generates false confidence in the “wrong” choice.

At the same time, consensus statements do serve a useful practical purpose and make the day-to-day clinical decisions easier for us. There is hence a need for the processes of consensus building to be robust and validated. It is indeed surprising that there is no uniform standard for preparing and reporting consensus statements in biomedical literature.

Consensus Statements, Guidelines, and Surveys

In this context, it is important to understand the difference between consensus statements, clinical guidelines, and questionnaire-based surveys. Whereas clinical guidelines

attempt to synthesise available scientific evidence for clinicians, consensus statements are meant for situations where scarcity of research data precludes a quantitative or qualitative synthesis. Similarly, questionnaire-based studies or surveys establish the current thinking and practice amongst professionals without making any attempt to identify experts amongst these professionals or generate a consensus. A simple survey of the opinion of experts without any attempt at convergence cannot hence be called a consensus statement and should be identified as such. Despite these clear demarcations, it is not uncommon to find overlap between a questionnaire-based survey, consensus statement, and a guideline in published bariatric surgery literature.

Achieving a Consensus: Is It Desirable?

Academic literature thrives on the difference of opinion and healthy evidence-based scientific debate. One could hence argue that achievement of consensus is in fact counterproductive for scientific curiosity and development. At the same time, one recognises that constant difference of opinion on vital areas of day-to-day practical matters may hamper functioning, and often, realities of life demand that a clear course of action be taken regardless of the differences in opinion. It is hence useful for experts to sit down and agree on a course of action, the aim of this exercise being to try and converge towards the “correct” option.

Constitution of the Expert Panel

Convergence to the correct option from amongst a range of options will only be possible if it is included in the list of

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