Obesity

BY SHERRY BOSCHERT
San Francisco Bureau

SAN FRANCISCO — Weight loss after bariatric surgery induces a drop in bone mineral density and increases the risk for falls and fractures, but it’s unclear whether most of these changes are clinically significant, Dr. Brian N. Sabowitz said.

The sparse data that exist tend to look at relative changes. They don’t give absolute numbers that might show whether a patient’s new bone density or fracture risk after weight loss from bariatric surgery is any higher than bone density or fracture risk in someone who already is at the target weight that the surgical patient eventually achieves, he said at the annual meeting of the International Society for Clinical Densitometry.

Obese people are likely to have vitamin D deficiency, which has been associated with an increased risk of fracture, noted Dr. Sabowitz, founder of a weight-loss clinic that performs bariatric surgery in Lake Havasu City, Ariz., where he also was a patient to undergo his own Roux-en-Y gastric bypass. In addition, Dr. Sabowitz is medical director of an osteoporosis center in Lake Havasu City.

Fifteen of 18 patients he saw in January 2008 for consults before bariatric surgery had deficient vitamin D levels. A prospective, controlled study in 2007 of 19 obese and 19 nonobese patients found serum levels of vitamin D were 60% lower in the obese group than in the controls. When they were exposed to UV radiation, obese patients absorbed half as much vitamin D, probably because the fat-soluble vitamin was being sequestered in adipose tissue instead of reaching the bloodstream. Bisphosphonates come in pill form and are not amenable to this.

“If nothing else, get scans of the bilateral forearms to have some baseline measurement,” Dr. Sabowitz said. If nothing else, get scans of the bilateral forearms to have some baseline measurement.

Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis Vaccine Adsorbed

Dr. Sabowitz said it’s important to get patients who are candidates for bariatric surgery “optimized preoperatively” by normalizing vitamin D and calcium levels and getting baseline readings of bone density and bone turnover markers to help with decision making.

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