

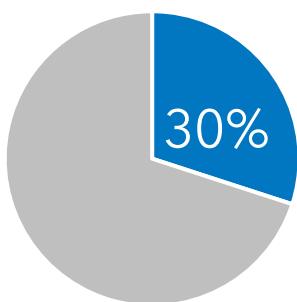
# 5

# Strategies to Address the Patient Demand from Expanded Bariatric Coverage in Georgia

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On August 12, the Georgia Department of Community Health approved bariatric surgery as a coverage option for up to 600,00 state employees. Based on current national obesity statistics, an estimated 100,000 employees with severe obesity could now be eligible for surgery coverage.

While the expanded bariatric coverage offers tremendous opportunity for Georgians to address their health concerns, it will present access and operational challenges for bariatric practices that are not prepared to address the demand. **5 key factors** exacerbate these challenges, especially for those with paper-driven processes.



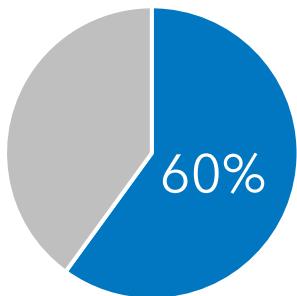
of COVID-related hospitalizations are attributable to obesity

## 1. Pandemic-Induced Health Factors

30% of COVID related hospitalizations during the pandemic are attributable to obesity. It is the most significant health factor driving hospitalization numbers. This means that, of the over 92,000 hospitalizations in Georgia, 27,600+ are attributable to obesity. Some health systems are reporting that, due to this, they are seeing an uptick in demand from patients who are considering surgery.

## 2. Suspension of non-essential surgeries

For the second time (or third, in some cases) states and healthcare systems are pausing non-essential surgeries. For many bariatric surgeons, this has created a backlog of existing cases as new ones enter at an even faster pace. The net result means a larger than usual pipeline to manage.



of eligible bariatric patients have researched bariatric surgery

**25,000**

projected shortfall of Georgia RNs

**50%**

of medical assistants, nursing assistants, and receptionist/schedulers report burnout

### 3. Coverage Factors

In a recent survey of over 1,000 patients considering bariatric surgery, nearly 60% of eligible bariatric patients have researched bariatric surgery for more than one year. In Georgia, this represents a new bariatric pipeline of pent-up patient demand in 2022. We are already seeing an uptick for consult requests and website traffic for one of our Georgia customers in the last few weeks, likely due to expanded bariatric coverage.

### 4. Staffing Shortage

The pandemic is impacting nursing staffing, and Georgia certainly is no exception. As mentioned in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Georgia has experienced a [shortage of 11,000 nurses](#). This is in addition to one of the [lower ratios of RNs to population](#) in the United States. In a [COVID-19 impact assessment](#) conducted earlier this year, nearly 10% of all nurses planned to quit due to insufficient staffing. For many bariatric practices who are using nurses to manage intake as well as provide care, there will be additional pressure to handle the influx of patients without having additional staff.

### 5. Burnout

The [stagnant growth of nurses](#) over the last decade while Georgia's population grew 10.6% combined with the pandemic has resulted in [unprecedented levels of burnout](#). In a recent study on the [impact of burnout during the pandemic](#), the roles that have the highest stress scores include Medical Assistants, Nursing Assistants, and Receptionist/Schedulers, with more than 50% reporting burnout.

# 5 Strategies to Respond to the Surge in Demand

The intake process for bariatric consultation requires significant coordination: managing the requests for consults (especially if they primarily come via phone), delivering patient education, collecting accurate insurance information, completing detailed intakes, verifying coverage. All are required before scheduling a consultation.

Typically these workflows and forms completion are labor-intensive and prone to cause delays. Today's consumer has little patience to wait days for responses, appointments, or to receive and deliver paperwork. This surge is a critical time to evaluate how to best manage the influx of bariatric consult requests. Here are 5 strategies to consider to help you attract and manage this influx.

## 1 Help patients find you

Nationally, 70% of all bariatric patients self-refer. And their primary channel is the internet. Unless they specifically are looking for you, they rely on search engines, reviews, and social media (Facebook and Twitter) for recommendations. Make sure you have a strong and positive presence in the channels that your bariatric patients are using, engage with them online to build trust, and encourage those who worked with you to share successes with others. Work with an SEO expert to ensure you show up on page one for searches. Continue to adapt your web presence to stay current for your patients.

## 2 Queue the right information

Your website (or bariatric landing page) needs to reflect what interests and motivates patients. Many bariatric programs design their pages to highlight their programs, staff, credentials, and capabilities. Patients want an array of information that includes success stories of others who have had great outcomes. Our research with more than 1000 bariatric patients shows that 69% want experiences of other patients. Highlighting these are more likely to result in their decision to choose you.

# 3

## Let patients manage their own education

Wellbe's proprietary research shows that 62% of bariatric patients are learning on their own, preferring self-guided learning more than in-person seminars or scheduled webinars. Forcing prospective patients to go through their initial education at specific times will deter a number of interested patients. Just putting a recorded webinar on YouTube will likely not be watched. Your education program needs to be organized and accessible to enable patients to get through it quickly, conveniently, and at their own pace. Shorter, topic-specific videos, articles, and a comprehensive FAQ library appeal to the majority of consumers.

# 4

## Have patients electronically submit their information

If you have your patients call to request an appointment and you follow up with a paper welcome packet, which includes providing insurance information, you create unnecessary delays. One study shows that nearly [65% of all referrals never make it to consult](#), in part due to paperwork and other time delays. By having patients enter information online, including their intake, insurance information, and preferred consult times, you speed up the verification and scheduling process. Having their email and phone number will expedite follow-ups and reminders.

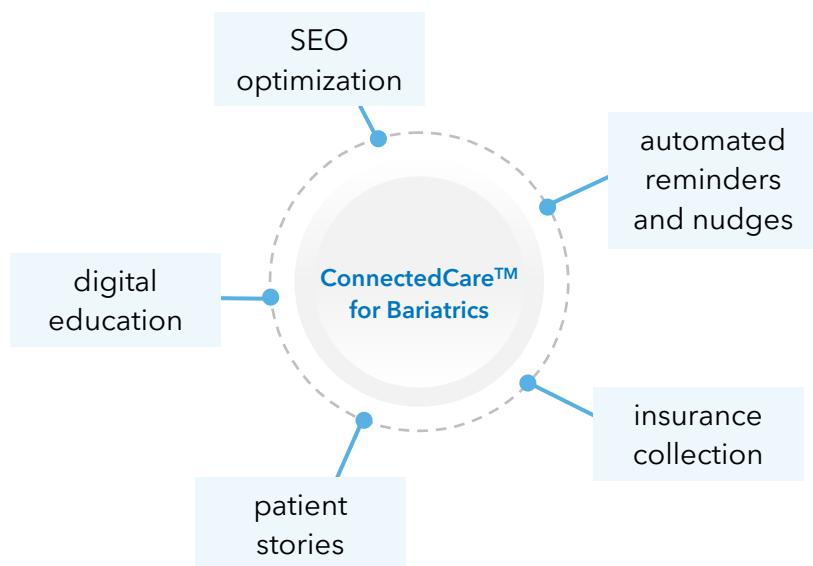
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## Automate your workflows

A large number of bariatric practices manually perform their workflows and track using spreadsheets, creating a high level of manual work. Automating workflows, including education, intake, insurance submission, and other efforts not only is more patient friendly, but significantly reduces staffing burden, improves the timeliness of communication, and keeps you up-to-date with your pipeline.

## Wellbe's ConnectedCare™ for Bariatric Surgery

Using an automated eAccess solution from Wellbe provides an efficient method to employ all these strategies. Developed from deep research and experience with bariatric programs and patients, ConnectedCare streamlines the online access funnel, from SEO optimization to attract new patients, to digital education, patient stories, insurance collection, and automated reminders and nudges. The content and activities presented in ConnectedCare use language and timing that is patient appropriate for the journey. And by automating all your workflows, ConnectedCare streamlines your staff's work, reducing the administrative burden even while increasing the volume of patients.



### Benefits of Care Automation for Biotics



## About Wellbe

Used in multiple bariatric practices, Wellbe's ConnectedCare™ eAccess solution provides an online, patient-friendly education and intake experience coupled with automated workflows which streamline and speed up the work required to qualify and get patients to their consults.

When combined with Wellbe's eNavigation solution, providers have a comprehensive patient enablement tool to get visibility and control of their entire surgical pipeline and boost their program performance from referral through recovery and beyond.

Contact us today to find out how we can quickly help you manage this growth:

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