

## Review Article

# Psychiatric evaluation and support for the elderly undergoing elective surgery

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## ABSTRACT

Providing evaluation and support for individuals who choose to undergo surgery is an essential aspect of comprehensive healthcare. With the global population aging, it's becoming more common for elderly individuals to opt for surgeries. This requires understanding how health impacts surgical outcomes in this vulnerable group. This study delves into the presentation and management of factors throughout the entire surgical process, including before, during, and after surgery. The clinical presentation covers existing health conditions, cognitive issues, emotional responses, and ethical considerations related to decision-making abilities. Recognizing these factors is crucial in order to provide tailored interventions that promote the well-being of patients and improve overall outcomes. Clinical management involves measures before surgery, collaborative care models during the period and strategies to prevent or address psychiatric complications after surgery. Ethical considerations are consistently important throughout this process, especially concerning decision-making abilities. This comprehensive approach involves psychiatrists, geriatricians, anesthetists and other healthcare professionals who work together to enhance the well-being of surgical patients. As our population continues to age, further research and attention on aspects of care within this demographic are vital for providing comprehensive and patient-centered healthcare.

**Keywords:** Elderly, Elective surgery, Psychiatric evaluation, Clinical manifestation, Perioperative psychiatric care

## INTRODUCTION

Considering the health and surgical outcomes of individuals undergoing elective surgery is an important aspect of healthcare. As the population ages it becomes more common for adults to undergo elective surgeries.<sup>1-3</sup> It

is crucial to understand the factors that influence both the operative and post-operative phases. Several studies emphasize the significance of evaluating the well-being of patients before surgery. They show that pre-existing psychiatric conditions, like depression and anxiety can have an impact on outcomes in this age group.<sup>4-6</sup>

Depression for example, has been linked to increased complications after surgery hospital stays, and higher mortality rates. By understanding a patient's state before surgery healthcare providers can customize interventions, manage expectations and implement strategies to minimize complications. Additionally, the pre-operative period offers an opportunity to identify and address any decline in individuals who are candidates for surgery. Research shows that there is a connection between existing cognitive decline and postoperative delirium, in older adults. A comprehensive psychiatric evaluation can help detect issues on enabling preventive measures to be taken and optimizing cognitive outcomes after surgery.<sup>7,8</sup> Providing support during this period is equally important. Research has shown that taking measures like providing counseling and support services can positively impact the recovery process after surgery for older patients. By offering assistance, we can address the challenges associated with surgery reduce anxiety levels and help individuals develop effective coping strategies.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately this promotes an experience during the post-operative period, for elderly individuals. Postoperative mental healthcare, for adults who choose to have surgery goes beyond the immediate recovery phase. Older patients may experience symptoms, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following their surgery.<sup>10,11</sup> A research study has identified the factors that increase the risk of operative PTSD in older individuals highlighting the importance of long term monitoring and support from mental health professionals.<sup>12-14</sup> By including these professionals as part of the operative care team it becomes easier to identify and manage any psychiatric issues that may arise ultimately leading to a better overall recovery experience. Additionally, there is a dimension regarding evaluation when considering an elderly individual's decision making ability in relation to elective surgeries.<sup>15,16</sup> Striking a balance between respecting autonomy and understanding how psychiatric conditions can impact decision making capacity requires thought. Another study examines these aspects of evaluation in this specific context emphasizing the need for a nuanced approach that respects patient autonomy while prioritizing safety. By conducting assessments valuable insights can be gained into an individual's ability to make decisions about elective surgery thus guiding healthcare providers towards making ethically sound choices. In conclusion integrating evaluation and support into the care provided for individuals undergoing elective surgery is crucial for comprehensive healthcare delivery. The literature highlights the effects that preexisting psychiatric conditions, cognitive impairment and the emotional strain of surgery have on the outcomes of patients. Taking measures by providing support before and after surgery can lead to better recovery, fewer complications and an overall improved well-being, for elderly individuals undergoing surgical procedures. The ethical aspects involved in decision making capacity introduce a level of complexity emphasizing the importance of a rounded and patient focused approach when providing psychiatric care to older individuals undergoing elective surgery. With the

increasing population it is necessary to conduct research and pay attention to the psychological elements of surgical care, for this demographic. This will help improve outcomes and ensure healthcare that prioritizes the needs of patients. The objective of this study is to provide an overview of evaluation and support for adults who are undergoing elective surgery.

## **METHODS**

On 26 November 2023, I conducted an examination of articles sourced from Cochrane Library, PubMed, and Scopus. The focus of my analysis was to delve into the evaluation and support provided to individuals who undergo elective surgery. Specifically, I looked at studies conducted in English since 2008 that place emphasis on the well-being of patients during elective surgery. The primary goal of this review is to provide guidance on assessment methods and early warning systems for healthcare professionals to manage psychiatric aspects in elderly patients undergoing elective surgery.

## **DISCUSSION**

The complex range of emotional and cognitive aspects involved in assessing and supporting individuals undergoing elective surgery presents various challenges throughout the different stages: before, during, and after the surgery. In the operative stage, it is important to identify any existing psychiatric conditions, such as depression and anxiety, that are commonly found in older adults.<sup>17,18</sup> These conditions can make it difficult for them to participate in operative preparations actively and may increase their vulnerability to post-operative complications. Cognitive impairment is another factor to consider when obtaining consent and assessing decision-making abilities. During the surgery itself, emotions like anxiety and fear can have an impact on well-being. It is crucial to provide support during this time to address these emotional responses, offer reassurance, and provide coping strategies. After the surgery, there is a risk of delirium, traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and challenges related to decision-making capacity. Delirium is an occurrence among surgical patients and can lead to longer hospital stays as well as an increased risk of long-term cognitive decline. Persistent psychological symptoms like PTSD highlight the need for monitoring and support. Addressing concerns related to decision-making capacity poses a clinical hurdle in the surgical journey. It necessitates assessments and a patient-centric approach. When it comes to individuals undergoing surgery, the management of psychiatric evaluation and support is vital from start to finish. Before the operation, it is crucial to conduct an assessment to identify and treat any pre-existing conditions. Collaborative efforts between healthcare providers are key in implementing customized interventions that address issues like depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline. Moving into this phase, proactive steps are taken to address reactions through collaborative care models and providing psychoeducation. After the

operation, clinical management primarily focuses on preventing complications like delirium and addressing any symptoms such as PTSD. Ethical aspects remain important with evaluations of decision-making ability to ensure a rounded and patient-centered approach.

### ***Clinical manifestation***

The complex and diverse nature of evaluation and support for individuals going through elective surgery involves addressing their psychological, emotional and cognitive needs before during and after the surgery. It is crucial to understand these nuances in order to provide tailored interventions that prioritize the well-being of patients and improve their surgical outcomes. During the surgery phase it is important to assess any existing psychiatric conditions in older patients thoroughly.<sup>19,20</sup> Depression and anxiety are commonly observed in this population characterized by symptoms such as sadness, changes in appetite, disturbances in sleep patterns and increased worry about the surgery. These manifestations can make it challenging for patients to participate in surgical preparations actively and may increase their vulnerability to complications after the surgery. Another significant aspect of operative psychiatric evaluation is assessing cognitive impairment. Older individuals undergoing surgery may exhibit signs of decline like memory loss, confusion and difficulties with decision making. Considering these manifestations becomes crucial when obtaining consent from patients as it requires assessment of their ability to understand information and engage in decision making processes. As elderly patients go through the period, they often experience responses that reflect their feelings, about the surgical experience. Anxiety and fear are common. They usually stem from worries, about the procedure itself, possible complications or how the recovery process will unfold. These emotional expressions can manifest as symptoms like restlessness, increased heart rate and elevated blood pressure. During this phase proactive psychiatric support is strategically provided to address these manifestations by offering reassurance and implementing coping strategies to reduce anxiety. After the surgery the clinical presentation expands to include the risk of delirium and other psychiatric complications. Elderly patients who undergo surgery are particularly vulnerable to operative delirium, which is characterized by acute confusion, disorientation and attention and awareness disturbances. This clinical presentation leads to hospital stays, delayed recovery processes and an increased risk of term cognitive decline. The enduring psychological impact is evident through symptoms such as traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following elective surgery in older adults. Post-operative PTSD includes thoughts, nightmares and heightened alertness triggered by reminders of the experience. Identifying and effectively managing these manifestations becomes crucial in preventing lasting distress and improving the overall quality of life for elderly surgical patients. Ethical considerations related to decision making capacity pose challenges throughout all stages of the surgical journey.

The clinical presentation arises when evaluating the patient's capacity to understand the advantages and disadvantages involved in surgery, make well-informed choices and give consent that is legally valid. Signs of compromised decision-making abilities can appear as disorientation, difficulty remembering details or struggles in comprehending the significance of the procedure. Thus, the extensive range of emotional and cognitive complexities becomes evident when considering the evaluation and support provided to elderly individuals undergoing elective surgery. It is crucial to recognize the signs related to existing psychiatric conditions, cognitive decline, anxiety and the potential post-operative complications in order to implement targeted interventions effectively. The diverse clinical manifestations experienced throughout stages of the process highlight the importance of adopting a comprehensive and personalized approach to psychiatric care, for elderly patients undergoing elective surgeries. This approach aims to enhance their well-being and optimize outcomes.

### ***Management***

The clinical care provided to individuals who are undergoing surgery involves a thorough and detailed process that spans the entire perioperative period. This comprehensive approach focuses on addressing the emotional and cognitive needs of elderly surgical patients aiming to improve their well-being and enhance surgical outcomes. During the operative phase proactive clinical management involves a comprehensive psychiatric evaluation to identify any existing psychiatric conditions in older patients. Conditions like depression and anxiety are given attention because they can significantly impact a patient's readiness for surgery. Recognizing and treating these conditions is crucial as they can affect the patient's ability to prepare for surgery and cope with the experience. The collaboration between psychiatrists, geriatricians and surgical teams is crucial at this stage to ensure that interventions are personalized to address conditions and promote a mental state for patients before surgery. One important aspect of operative clinical management involves focusing on cognitive impairment. By including assessments as part of evaluations healthcare teams can identify patients who may have difficulty making decisions.<sup>21</sup> Consulting with neuropsychologists and geriatric specialists plays a role in developing tailored approaches for patients dealing with challenges. It is essential to maintain standards by providing communication support and decision-making assistance for patients with cognitive impairment during the pre-operative phase. Moving into the period, clinical management places emphasis on measures to address emotional responses such as anxiety and fear that older patients may experience. Collaborative care models involving professionals, anesthetists and nursing staff play a role in providing comprehensive emotional support. Strategies like psychoeducation, relaxation techniques and mindfulness interventions become tools for managing anxiety during the setting. This collaborative approach

ensures that patients' emotional well-being remains a focus throughout their surgical journey. In the operative phase, clinical management expands to include prevention and early detection of psychiatric complications, with particular attention given to delirium.<sup>22</sup> It is essential to implement protocols aimed at preventing delirium in individuals who have surgery. These protocols should include mobilization, regulating sleep-wake cycles, and conducting medication reviews. By doing so, we can significantly reduce the occurrence of delirium in the elderly. After surgery, psychological support is often provided to help patients cope with the impact and adjust to the operative environment. It is important to address symptoms like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a crucial part of post-operative care. Collaborative efforts involving psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers are essential in offering personalized interventions for patients who may be at risk of or already experiencing operative PTSD. Behavioral therapy, along with types of psychotherapy, can be employed to mitigate symptoms and enhance one's mental wellness. Long-term follow-up and support are important for monitoring and managing the effects of surgery among elderly individuals. Ethical considerations, including assessing decision-making capacity, are integral throughout the process of caring for surgical patients. Regular evaluations of decision-making ability, in cases involving impairment, ensure that patients fully understand the risks and benefits associated with elective surgery so they can make informed choices. Ethical consultations involving healthcare providers, patients, and their families guide decision-making processes while respecting autonomy. It is important to have communication and documented assessments of decision-making abilities to ensure ethical clinical management for this group of people. Additionally, when it comes to individuals undergoing surgery, a proactive and collaborative approach is crucial in providing psychiatric evaluation and support. From evaluations conducted before surgery to providing support throughout the entire process, it is crucial to have a comprehensive approach involving various healthcare professionals. Psychiatrists, geriatricians, anesthesiologists, and other experts work together to address the needs of individuals undergoing surgery. This holistic clinical management aims to enhance their health and greatly enhance the outcomes of procedures.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is essential to incorporate evaluation and support into the healthcare of individuals who are undergoing elective surgery. By recognizing signs, such as preexisting conditions and emotional responses, we can better understand the need for specific interventions. From operative assessments to post-operative care, comprehensive management enhances well-being and improves surgical outcomes. Ethical considerations make this approach more complex, highlighting the importance of patient-centered care for elderly patients undergoing elective surgery. As the aging population continues to grow, research and focus on aspects become more critical

in providing holistic healthcare that centers around the needs of each individual patient.

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