

A SALUTE TO ... NAVAL HOSPITAL JACKSONVILLE'S

GASTRIC BYPASS SURGERY ANNUAL

SUPPORT GROUP FASHION SHOW



Twelve patients who have experienced a new lease on life through Naval Hospital Jacksonville Fla.'s (NH Jax) Gastric Bypass Surgery Program celebrated their accomplishments on 29 Feb 08 with the program's annual Gastric Bypass Support Group Fashion Show. This year the theme was "A leap of faith... A leap of hope... A leap of health! A celebration of successes."

The hospital's annual Gastric Bypass Program Fashion Show is an opportunity for patients to share what the program has done for them. The road they've chosen hasn't been without risks and challenges. The commitment they've made is for life. Most men think of a fashion show as "a woman thing." But 54-year-old Ken Robinson, is proud to show off his new look. But what he's really happy about is what the gastric bypass program has done for his health. He said, "The greatest benefit is just being here today. The biggest benefit is medical." Robinson no longer takes any medication and he can shop in a regular store and buy normal clothes. Another benefit is not using an extender seatbelt when traveling by plane he said. Robinson's wife Nancy is a nurse in the Naval Hospital Jacksonville Family Medicine Department. She remains a source of encouragement for him and the other patients in the program.

The hospital's support group is a key element of the patients' recovery process. Lorena Mack is a sponsor for new patients entering the Gastric Bypass Program. She had her surgery in April 2004 and weighed 250 pounds. Today, that's down to 132 pounds, a 118 pound reduction. The 52-year-old no longer needs blood pressure or heart medications. Lorena said that as a sponsor, "I give them a reality check from the patient's point of view rather than of the surgeon. There are often questions they will ask another patient that they won't ask a professional."

Gastric Bypass Surgery patients soon learn that achieving that "new you" involves more than just the physical results of the surgery. It involves a complete life-style change. It isn't just snip, snip, and their days of healthy eating, exercise and doctor visits are over. This just gives them a new start, the opportunity to say I've got a fighting chance now and this time I'm not going to blow it. I'm doing this because I want a better life with my partner, because I want to be there for my children and most important I'm doing it for me. I'm ready to live!"

More than 750 patients have been through NH Jax's Gastric Bypass program since it was started in 1997. Its success has depended on the qualifications, experience and dedication of a highly skilled surgical team and the dedication of all who deliver pre and post-operative care. In this kind of work, and especially in a hospital where individualized compassionate care is a hallmark, patients can't be just another 15-minute appointment. They receive individualized care which fully involves the patient, their families and all of Naval Hospital Jacksonville's provider assets.

Patients who enter the Gastric Bypass Surgery Program are usually people who have exhausted every other means of losing their weight and now face serious medical complications if their weight isn't brought under control. They've tried all the diets and attempted exercise programs but they couldn't shed the pounds. This could be because of genetic or medical issues, or from psycho-social behaviors developed from early childhood. Regardless, they now faced life-threatening illness brought on or complicated by their obesity. Sometimes it is their last hope.

Imagine how you'd feel if your doctor sat you down, took your hand and said if didn't lose weight you were going to die and you knew you couldn't lose the weight on your own.

Studies have shown that 13 million Americans (and that number is rising) are considered morbidly obese. In fact, today, 283 million Americans, approximately two thirds of the adult population, suffer from weight-related health conditions.

Continued next page (2)

Continued from page 1

**A SALUTE TO ... NAVAL HOSPITAL JACKSONVILLE—
GASTRIC BYPASS SURGERY PROGRAM'S ANNUAL SUPPORT GROUP FASHION SHOW**

*No one should
consider this as their
first option
for losing weight.*

On top of all that, many individuals carry the emotional baggage of low self-esteem fostered by years of guilt laid on by friends, family, even strangers on the street. For many people the standard cures of diet and exercise can't realistically be expected to fix the problem according to Capt. (Dr.) James Prescott Flint, assistant program director. He said, "It is common knowledge in the medical community, as well as in the public eye, that the far majority of diets and diet programs cannot sustain weight loss in any significant fashion. People may lose a significant amount of weight, and this is great, but the trick is to keep the weight off. Many patients who are interested in the NH Jax program, recount a history of significant weight loss but then they gain it all back. These are the people who might be good candidates for the hospital's bariatric surgery program otherwise known as gastric bypass surgery."

Flint stressed that not everyone can become a candidate for the program, but that anyone who is morbidly obese and interested in bariatric surgery, should speak to his or her primary care provider about the program. "We have strict criteria for entering the program, but there are many people who are perfect candidates, but are never referred," he said. "Until the mainstream media and the mainstream medical community jump on board the bariatric surgical express, patients are going to have to do their own investigating, and ask that they be considered for the program, as long as they meet the criteria. Sometimes, they can't just sit back and let things happen. Just like in our program, sometimes, they have to work for their health."

As part of the hospital's General Surgery Department, the Gastric Bypass Surgery team is led by Cmdr. Craig Shepps, director; Dr. Flint, previously mentioned as the assistant director, and Noemi Massari, RNBSN, coordinator/case manager. Dr. Shepps is a general surgeon with experience in obesity surgery since 1979. He has been the director of the program since 2004. Flint is also a highly skilled general surgeon, who earned his M.D. from the University of Florida's College of Medicine, and graduated from the general surgical residency at St. Mary's Hospital in Connecticut, a Yale program affiliate. Since then, he has completed multiple advanced laparoscopic surgical programs and courses. He has a keen interest in laparoscopic surgery and all it offers. Massari is a registered nurse and a member of the American Society for Metabolic & Bariatric surgery. She has worked with the program 12 years. She plays a vital role working with the patients and has developed a highly successful Gastric Bypass program. She has personally managed, directed and case managed over 500 patients in this program. Massari also coordinates the program's support group. She said, "This is an invaluable asset to the program in that it decreases patient visits to emergency rooms and clinics, the use of large amounts of medications, and helps patients become more active and thus more productive in society."

Shepps said this annual event is something that he really looks forward to because it gives the patients the opportunity to show off the success they have achieved from a significant lifestyle change. "I enjoy all aspects of being a general surgeon, particularly with active duty members who are deployed; but bariatrics is by far the most rewarding. The patients are profoundly grateful, repeatedly thanking me for giving them their life back! It is tremendously rewarding to be able to care for diabetes and hypertension and help these patients become happier and more productive members of society."

I cannot count the number of times patients have told me how they want to be around when their children grow up. It breaks my heart to hear that, but, I know it's true. When we can guarantee that we can make that happen, the joy is palpable!"



*Some before and after
photos of program
participants*

*Photos courtesy of
NH Jacksonville
Public Affairs*

