



*****NEWS RELEASE*****

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WEIGHT MANAGEMENT CENTER OF RUTGERS NJMS AT UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL OPENS TO ADDRESS N.J.'S OBESITY EPIDEMIC

Multidisciplinary Approach Used to Help Patients; In Some Cases, Bariatric Surgery May be Best Option

NEWARK, NJ — The new Weight Management Center of Rutgers New Jersey Medical School (NJMS) at University Hospital (UH) in Newark has launched to address the obesity epidemic affecting our community and state. The Weight Management Center takes a multidisciplinary approach to help patients through a comprehensive set of services that unite the expertise of medical and surgical specialists with nutritional education, evidence-based practices to mindful eating, support for physical activity and guidance on living a healthier lifestyle.

By employing a coordinated patient-centered approach, the Weight Management Center of Rutgers NJMS at University Hospital offers a medically supervised weight loss program, a bariatric (weight loss) surgery program, or a combination of both.

Obesity, defined as a body mass index (BMI) greater than 30, is a major public health problem with an increasing prevalence both across the United States and in New Jersey.

In New Jersey, more than one in four people is living with obesity. In the city of Newark, the obesity rate is even higher, at nearly 40%. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has termed obesity as a national epidemic and a major contributor to some of the leading causes of death in the United States, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some types of cancer.

Obesity also increases the risk of developing serious health conditions, such as hypertension, dyslipidemia, obstructive sleep apnea, osteoarthritis, fatty liver disease, and mental illness, such as depression and anxiety. Obesity impacts every organ system and can have dangerous consequences for one's health.

At the Weight Management Center, a team of obesity medicine specialists, endocrinologists, bariatric surgeons, advanced bariatric endoscopists, behavioral health specialists, physical therapists, nutritionists and patient navigators work together to assist patients in achieving positive health results.

The medically-supervised program offers patients with obesity non-surgical options to achieve meaningful weight loss and improve their health. Studies show that modest weight loss of about 5-10% can improve many obesity-related chronic health conditions, including diabetes, high blood pressure and arthritis.

Patients will receive a comprehensive treatment plan, including individualized nutritional and physical activity recommendations to support healthy lifestyle changes. In addition, some patients may benefit from treatment with medications that promote weight loss and improve metabolic health. Additionally, bariatric surgery may be the best option for patients who meet the recommended guidelines for this level of intervention.

Candidates for bariatric surgery are individuals with a BMI of at least 35, along with a co-existing medical condition, or individuals with a BMI of more than 40. Patients generally seek bariatric surgery when they have not achieved meaningful or sustained weight loss with lifestyle changes alone. Research shows that bariatric surgery results in significant long-lasting weight loss, reduction of premature death, improvement or cure of high blood pressure, sleep apnea and reflux disease, and is the only known surgical treatment for Type 2 diabetes in patients with obesity.

The numbers of annual bariatric surgery procedures are on the rise nationally. In 2019, more than 256,000 bariatric surgeries were performed in the United States, according to figures from the American Society for Bariatric and Metabolic Surgery. Notably the complication and mortality rates (4% and 0.1%, respectively) of bariatric surgery are comparable to some of the country's safest and most common surgeries.

The bariatric surgery program at the Weight Management Center is structured to provide patients the opportunity to realize significant, long-term weight loss through a program of pre-surgical evaluation, surgery, recovery and long-term nutritional counseling. The team consists of board-certified bariatric surgeons, registered nurses, a registered dietitian, a patient navigator, and other specialists who are committed to helping surgical candidates achieve their weight loss and health goals.

Although bariatric surgery has been around since the 1990s, modern-day minimally invasive procedures are considered safer and more effective than earlier approaches. These modern procedures offer their own benefits and risks, but often result in fewer complications and positive health effects. Current bariatric surgical procedures offered include laparoscopic and robotic sleeve gastrectomy and Roux-en-Y gastric bypass.

Bariatric surgery is done through four to five small half-inch incisions. There is no large scarring and bariatric surgery has been found to be one of the safest surgeries. Additionally, many people do not know that bariatric surgery is covered by Medicare and Medicaid.

Meaningful and sustained weight loss, whether achieved through medical and/or surgical intervention, can contribute to improvements in overall health, and may even result in complete elimination of health conditions such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), obstructive sleep apnea and infertility, among others.

“We consider the Weight Management Center a key ingredient in our ongoing effort to create healthier communities in the City of Newark and the surrounding area,” says **Lissette M. Cespedes, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine, Division of Endocrinology at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and a University Hospital doctor.** “By taking a coordinated, patient-centered approach that offers a multi-disciplinary team of clinicians committed to helping our neighbors lead healthier lives, this program is unique from many of the stand-alone weight loss programs in the region. We are proud to make this innovative program available to our patients and community.”

“By combining medical and surgical options for patients, we are able to take an individualized approach to weight management for each and every patient,” said **Aziz M. Merchant, MD, FACS, Associate Professor, Chief, Division of General/MIS Surgery at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School and a University Hospital doctor.** “We take our commitment to being the region’s trustworthy resource for health and wellness very seriously. Surgery may not be an option for every patient, but through the Center’s unique program, we take great care to make sure that each patient receives a customized plan that meets their individual needs.”

“As a public hospital that serves a majority-minority population, we are keenly aware that adults of color have the highest prevalence of age-adjusted obesity, and these trends are no different here in Newark,” said **Shereef Elnahal, MD, MBA, President and CEO of University Hospital.** “We are glad to partner with Rutgers New Jersey Medical School to provide a comprehensive set of services that will have a deep impact on the community we serve.”

The Weight Management Center is part of Rutgers Health at the University Hospital Ambulatory Care Center. With healthcare teams led by Rutgers Health physicians, the University Hospital Ambulatory Care Center offers the highest quality care in a private office setting. In addition, it provides a wide range of outpatient services that utilize state-of-the-art medical technology so patients can access the help they need when they need it.

To learn more, call University Hospital at 973-972-9000.

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About University Hospital

University Hospital is part of one of the nation’s leading academic medical centers and is the Level 1 Trauma Center for Northern New Jersey. Located at University Heights in Newark, University Hospital is a principal teaching hospital of Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences and a regional resource for advanced services across many medical specialties. For more information about University Hospital, please visit www.uhnj.org.

About Rutgers New Jersey Medical School

Founded in 1954, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School is the oldest school of medicine in the state. Today it is part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and graduates approximately 170 physicians a year. In addition to providing the MD degree, the school offers MD/PhD, MD/MPH and MD/MBA degrees through collaborations with other institutions of

higher education. Dedicated to excellence in education, research, clinical care and community outreach, the medical school comprises 20 academic departments and works with several healthcare partners, including its principal teaching hospital, The University Hospital. Its faculty consists of numerous world-renowned scientists and many of the region's "top doctors." Home to the nation's oldest student-run clinic, New Jersey Medical School hosts more than 50 centers and institutes, including the Public Health Research Institute Center, the Global Tuberculosis Institute and the Neurological Institute of New Jersey. For more information visit: njms.rutgers.edu.