Patient credits multidimensional team with successful obesity surgery

At 5’2” Lisa Winn is a petite, athletic woman with a radiant smile and electric personality. She teaches 3rd Grade and ice skating lessons and seems to have an endless supply of energy. Maybe it’s a combination of Winn’s self-confidence and high energy that allowed her to lose more than 110 pounds using gastric bypass surgery as her tool.

“Before I saw [surgeons at the VCU Medical Center], I spent literally $25,000 on various diet aids,” says Winn. “I’d have success for a little while but I’d gain back on the weight back and then some. It was so frustrating.”

The frustration was even more acute for Winn because even at her heaviest, she was physically active, teaching several ice skating lessons each week. Her problem was a low energy level that she tried to fix by consuming sugary complex carbohydrates in an attempt to supply her body with more energy. “I ate anything that I thought would give me energy. And I ate that way all day long,” she says.

VCU Medical Center surgeons honed in on Winn’s lower than average energy levels and referred her to the VCU Medical Center’s Sleep Disorder Center. Their hunch was affirmed when sleep experts found Winn waking up 72 times each night as a result of sleep apnea, a common and serious condition that can co-exist with obese people. And because Winn’s condition was so severe the gastric bypass surgery was covered by her health insurance provider.

“[Gastric bypass surgery] is not an easy fix,” she explains. “[The team at the VCU Medical Center] expects patients to attend several educational classes and they provide a 165-page reference book detailing exactly what you can eat and how to eat it. And this is for the rest of your life.” Patients are also advised about vitamin deficiencies that are a common but preventable side effect of the surgery.

Winn’s surgery was conducted using the laparoscopic method, where several small incisions are used and surgeons use small tools and cameras to guide their work inside the body. This approach makes the patient’s recovery easier and quicker. “I was back on the ice in three weeks,” says Winn.

“The best part? For one, my sleep apnea has been completely resolved so I have tons of energy. It’s also great to go into clothing stores now and people actually want to help me find clothes,” she notes, eager to wear her size 4 bikini again this summer. “It’s amazing how you’re treated by the public when you’re a smaller size.”

For more information, please call 804-828-8000.

Lisa Winn

VCU Medical Center using light therapy to prevent cancer

Physicians at the VCU Medical Center are the only ones in the Richmond area offering Photodynamic Therapy (PDT) as an option for those suffering from Barrett’s Esophagus, a condition identified by the proliferation of irregular, or pre-cancerous, cells of the esophagus. Traditionally, patients with this condition have had a 30 to 52-fold increase in the occurrence of esophageal cancer, as opposed to the normal population. Conventional treatments for Barrett’s esophagus have included esophagectomy but this is a highly risky procedure and carries with it obvious drawbacks.

PDT for Barrett’s Esophagus has been shown to be an attractive alternative to esophagectomy by using light therapy to eliminate abnormal, or pre-cancerous cells. A relatively new procedure, PDT involves injecting the patient with a photosensitive drug two days prior to treatment. The drug literally “sticks” to cancerous cells and becomes extremely toxic to the cancer cells when exposed to red laser light (about the intensity of a grocery store scanner).

Normal cells are unharmed. Following exposure to the laser light, cancer cells die and slough off and are eventually flushed from the patient’s system. The only harmful side effect with the use of PDT is the body’s extreme sensitivity to light for about a month following the treatments.

For more information about this innovative procedure, please call 1-800-762-6161.