Hundreds helped in Bariatric Specialty Clinic's first year

MEDICINE HAT — More than 200 southern Albertans have received life-changing, weight management support at the local Bariatric Specialty Clinic since the Alberta Health Services facility opened one year ago.

Over the past 12 months, 62 male patients and 144 female patients made more than 3,300 total visits to the clinic where they worked with physicians, registered nurses, dietitians, mental health specialists and rehabilitation professionals to set individual health goals and create action plans for success.

"The number of referrals we've had in our first year shows there was a need in the community for a clinic like ours, and I'm pleased we've been able to help so many people identify root causes of their obesity and support them in learning to adopt new, healthier behaviours," says Dr. Adeel Azam, Medical Director, Bariatric Specialty Clinic.

Weight loss isn't the only goal for most clinic patients. Many others also wish to improve their nutrition, increase physical activity and/or identify possible physical and mental health issues that could be contributing to their obesity.

About 15 per cent of clinic patients have undergone bariatric surgery.

"Most patients are able to attend appointments and classes and make the changes they need without surgical intervention," says registered nurse Kim Zukowski, a case manager at the Bariatric Specialty Clinic. "Obesity is a chronic condition with no quick fixes. We might see these patients for up to a full year, but it really depends on the individual and their personal goals."

Angela Pederson credits the clinic for helping her lose 92 pounds over the past seven months. She's now 180 pounds and still losing weight.

"I'm grateful for everything I've learned through the clinic," says the 31-year-old Medicine Hat woman, who has struggled with her weight since high school. Last June, she underwent laporoscopic surgery to shrink the size of her stomach.

To be approved for surgery, Pederson had to learn to change her lifestyle first. She met with a registered nurse and dietitian every four to six weeks, and attended more than 20 hours of classes on healthy eating, label reading, portion control, food preparation and physical activity. She also quit smoking and learned about the impact of stress and sleep on obesity.

Today, she continues to attend monthly classes to help her maintain her results.

"It hasn't been easy. It's still a lot of work that takes effort and commitment. You can't just have surgery and go back to old behaviours. It won't work. This is a forever change but it's worth it," says Pederson. "I'm confident I can now maintain the results I couldn't before and I'm excited for what my future holds."

Admission to the clinic is through referral only. To qualify, people must be under the age of 65, and committed to making extensive long-term lifestyle changes. The clinic also assesses candidates to make sure they don't have untreated and unmanaged psychological or mental health issues. Surgical candidates must quit smoking months prior to their procedure.

Referrals are not needed to join Alberta Healthy Living chronic disease support and prevention classes, which focus on nutrition, physical activity, stress, self-management and overall healthy living. To register, call:

- 403-793-6659 (Brooks)
- 403-388-6654 (Lethbridge) / Toll-free: 1-866-506-6654 (West)
- 403-529-8969 (Medicine Hat) / Toll-free: 1-866-795-9079 (East)

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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