



WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA BARIATRIC INSTITUTE

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Welcome to the Fall Edition of the Western Pennsylvania Bariatric Institute (WPABI) Newsletter! My name is **Jessica Custer, CRNP**, and I would like to thank you for taking the time to read more about the WPABI.



I am a graduate of Duquesne University with a master's degree in nursing science. As a board-certified nurse practitioner through the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, I provide direct patient care to our patients and support all who come through our doors. Recently, I became certified through the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery for Obesity Medicine Pharmacology which allows me to provide our patients with the latest in medical treatment options for obesity and reflects my commitment to helping you achieve your healthcare goals.

I have been part of the WPABI for four years but have worked as a registered nurse for more than 17 years in many different areas of nursing including the postoperative bariatric surgical unit and the operating room.

I grew up just outside of Johnstown and have remained in the area. My husband and I have a son, who will soon be a teenager, and an English Bulldog, Dozer, who is our family's best friend. I also have two nieces who are my little "besties."

I work with an astounding, dedicated team and surgeon at WPABI. I am grateful to have such an amazing career supporting our patients to take the first steps with weight loss and enhancing their journey to better health.

Jessica Custer, CRNP



Patient Spotlight

When she took her 6-year-old son to the park to play, Kim Randall would have to watch from her car. The pain and stress of weighing more than 535 pounds was simply too much for her to bear.

“Weighing that much is so constantly painful. Not being able to move around, go to school functions, worrying about the weight capacity of a chair, or having a steering wheel or seatbelt cutting into me,” said the 34-year-old Upper Yoder resident. “All of that just added up to continuous pain and agony.”

Kim knew what she had to do. But she couldn’t do it alone. That’s when she reached out to Dr. D’Arcy Duke, Medical Director of the Western Pennsylvania Bariatric Institute, part of the Conemaugh Physician Group. She wanted to have gastric-bypass weight-loss surgery.

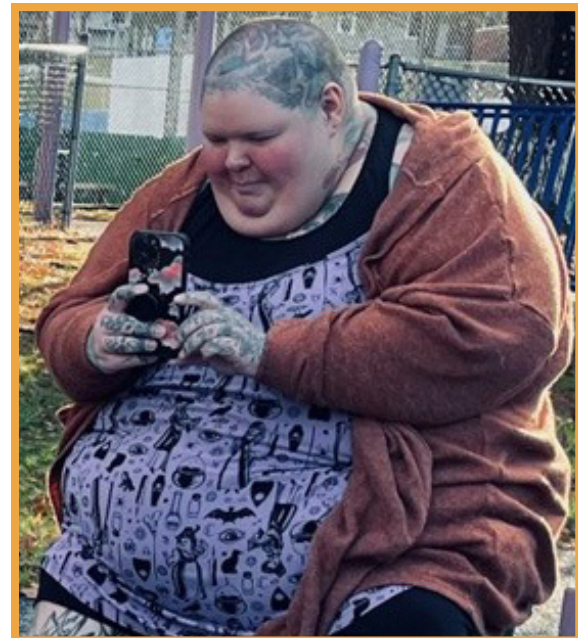
“Looking back, I won’t sugar coat it. There’s no magic wand. It basically takes great commitment and lots of hard work,” said Kim, who is 5-foot, 7-inches tall.

“Going the route I chose was really difficult, but it was relatively short-lived. It was either that or continue to live with lifelong – and life-threatening – obesity,” she said.

“My choice was obvious. And Doctor Duke and her team helped to make it happen. It took a lot of blood, sweat and tears. But, wow, was it ever worth it.”

In preparation for the November 2023 gastric bypass, Kim followed a strict seven-month program during which she lost nearly 100 pounds. She weighed 445 pounds on the day of her surgery.

The gastric bypass isn’t an easy fix she said but it was a tool that **“entirely transformed my life.”** Keeping the weight off, she said, has revolved around closely tracking caloric intake; committing to ongoing, strenuous exercise; and “promising that I’ll never, ever return to the lifestyle that made me so big in the first place.”



Patient Spotlight [continued]

Kim now weighs 224 pounds – or about 315 pounds less than before.

“I’ve shed the equivalent of two people. So much has changed; big and little things. I’m able to do small things that most people take for granted, like walking without crying in pain, cleaning my house and walking my dog,” Kim said. “I realize what a blessing I’ve received. The pain and suffering are all gone.”

Kim cringes when she thinks back on how things used to be. She felt the heavy weight of people’s stares and judgment when she weighed more than 535 pounds. As a result, she became a recluse.

The staring and gawking have ended with her

dramatic weight loss. She now enjoys going to the gym for weightlifting, driving to Altoona or Greensburg to shop, and “running around like crazy after my rambunctious 7-year-old son.”

While friends, loved ones and neighbors all congratulate Kim on the weight loss, her metamorphosis has been far more than simply physical.

“It has transformed my energy level, my personality, and the way I come across and present myself. It’s changed everything,” she said with a big smile.

Her thoughts frequently drift back to Dr. Duke and her team at the Western Pennsylvania Bariatric Institute. Kim has convinced her sister, brother-in-law and a friend to seek Dr. Duke’s help.

“Through Doctor Duke and her team, I basically came face-to-face with the health and mental issues that caused me to become super-big,” she said. “I confronted all those issues with a great deal of nutritional and psychological help.

“They were as gentle, compassionate and kind as possible in helping me to face some extremely difficult issues. Saying they are amazing isn’t nearly enough. They made my transformation as easy as possible. In fact, they made it all possible.”



Kim Randall

WPABI named Aetna Institute of Quality

Western Pennsylvania Bariatric Institute, part of Conemaugh Physician Group, has been recognized as an Aetna Institute of Quality® for Bariatric Surgery, a designation awarded to facilities that demonstrate excellence in care, quality outcomes, and patient safety.

Institutes of Quality are selected by Aetna based on a track record of successful clinical performance and commitment to continuous improvement. This recognition reflects the Institute's dedication to delivering evidence-based, patient-centered weight-loss surgery and comprehensive support before and after procedures.

This designation is a meaningful acknowledgment of the exceptional care and outcomes our team provides every day," said D'Arcy Duke, MD, Medical Director of the Western Pennsylvania Bariatric Institute. "We take a comprehensive, patient-centered approach to weight loss and are proud to be a trusted resource for people on their journey to better health."

To earn this designation, facilities must meet rigorous standards for quality, safety, and cost-efficiency. The Aetna Institute of Quality designation helps patients make informed decisions by identifying hospitals and surgical centers that consistently deliver high-value care.

The Western Pennsylvania Bariatric Institute provides a full continuum of care for individuals pursuing weight-loss surgery—from personalized evaluations and nutritional counseling to minimally invasive procedures and long-term follow-up.

"This recognition positively reflects the strength of our program and the compassion of our entire team consisting of our nurse practitioner, bariatric coordinator, nursing staff, support staff and myself," said Dr. Duke. "We're honored to help support our patients achieve their health and weight loss goals all while achieving real, lasting change."



Healthy Recipe



Cheesy Meatball Skillet

**THIS RECIPE MAKES
8 - 10 MEATBALLS**

Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- 1¼ pounds of lean ground beef
- 1 large egg
- ¼ cup of grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 teaspoon of sea salt or kosher salt (if using regular table salt, use ½ teaspoon)
- ¼ teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons of finely minced or crushed garlic (about 2 - 3 cloves)
- ¼ cup of chopped flat leaf parsley
- ½ cup whole wheat bread crumbs blended with ½ cup of milk or water in a cup
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- 1 jar of pasta sauce
- 2 cups of shredded mozzarella cheese

PREPARATION

Combine the ground beef with the egg, Parmesan, salt, pepper, garlic, parsley, and bread crumb paste in a large bowl until well blended. Portion into golf ball size meatballs. A metal ice cream scoop works perfectly for this!

Brown the meatballs on all sides in the olive oil, in nonstick skillet over medium high heat. Add the sauce, bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer on medium for 10 to 12 minutes depending on the size of your meatballs. Add the mozzarella, cover, turn off heat and simmer 1 to 2 minutes, just so the cheese melts. Scatter with a little fresh basil for a punch of Italian flavor

2025 Upcoming Info Sessions

Want to learn more about your options when it comes to weight loss? Attend one of our FREE Information Sessions!

November 21 - 1:00 pm
November 25 - 5:00 pm

December 5 - 8:30 am
December 11 - 1:00 pm
December 17 - 4:00 pm

Call our office at
814.539.8725 to register!

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Western
Pennsylvania
Bariatric Institute**

The Weight is Over

Medical weight loss (Ozempic, Wegovy, etc.) has become popular over the last few years.

People may opt to take medications for weight loss for several reasons. Most importantly, weight loss prevents and relieves chronic medical conditions related to obesity. Weight loss medications such as the injectable forms can manage blood glucose levels with the added benefit of reducing body weight.

While medical weight loss is expanding, it is important to understand the benefits and risks associated with use.

First, patients should make an appointment with their weight management provider to review health history, voice their struggles with weight gain and review options.

Second, it is important for the patient to be educated on the medication, in terms of side effects, dosages, indications, contraindications and usage.

Third, nutrition and physical activity are crucial to successful weight loss. When solely relying on medication for weight loss, there is a potential for weight regain.

Lastly, continuing to follow with your weight management team is important to prevent serious side effects and for continued support to a healthier you.

If you are struggling with your weight, contact the Western Pennsylvania Bariatric Institute to talk with our qualified healthcare team.