



Netcare Waterfall  
City Hospital



# OBESITY SURGERY EXCELLENCE AT NETCARE WATERFALL CITY HOSPITAL

Netcare Waterfall City Hospital is home to Africa's only internationally-accredited Bariatric Centre of Excellence.

By David Goncalves and Isobel Vosloo, Netcare Waterfall City Hospital.



*The Bariatric Surgery Team from left to right: Dr Gerhard Botha, Julia Mogaswa, Nicola Drabble, David Goncalves, René Hagen, Driekie van der Merwe, Francette Bekker, Cecil Kuys, Annelie van der Lingen, Irene Goncalves, Rachael Darné, Karen Gibson, Isobel Vosloo, Thendayi Marambakuyana, Prof Tess van der Merwe, Dr Gary Fetter and Geraldine Letnik*

**B**ariatric surgery can be loosely defined as surgery on the stomach and intestines to help reduce obesity and obesity-related diseases. There are 11 locally-accredited centres in various parts of the country, which obtained their accreditation through the principal centre at Netcare Waterfall City Hospital.

## THE TEAM

The team at Netcare Waterfall City Hospital is led by specialist endocrinologist Prof Tess van der Merwe, and specialist surgeon and surgical team leader, Dr Gary K Fetter. Prof van der Merwe is the Chair of the South African Society for Obesity Metabolism (SASSO), as well as CEO of the 11 Centres of

Excellence for Metabolic Medicine and Surgery (CEMMS(SA)). The team is comprised of both Dr Fetter and Prof Van der Merwe, as well as psychologist Mr David Goncalves, specialist dietitians Ms Nicola Drabble and Mrs Francette Bekker, as well as Dr Gerhard Botha, a family physician and general practitioner, and psychiatrist Dr Zubeida Mahomed. The team also comprises an essential complement of management and administrative staff. Mrs Annelie van der Lingen, Practice Manager; Mrs Geraldine Letnik, Executive Secretary; Ms Isobel Vosloo, Executive Secretary; Sr Karen Gibson, Infusion Clinic and Medical Aid Motivations; Mrs Karen Darné, Medical Aid Accounts; Ms Driekie van der Merwe, Secretarial Assistance Sessional rooms; Ms Julia Mogaswe, Senior Office Assistant; Ms Rachael Darné, Motivations and Database; Ms Tendayi Marambakuyana, Office Assistant; Cecil Kuys, Executive Secretary and Receptionist; Ms René Hagen, Personal Assistant and Medical Accountant.

Though the team has been working together for several years prior to the building of the Netcare Waterfall City Hospital, the building of the hospital allowed for the creation of the only dedicated facility exclusively for Bariatric Surgery in South Africa. To date, over 2074 surgeries have been successfully performed.

## THE PROCESS

Bariatric surgery is not a well understood surgery in the general public arena.

Though most commonly associated with obesity, it is also a very effective tool to address hypertension, elevated cholesterol levels, type 2 diabetes, as well as inflammation and endocrine system disorders such as Polycystic ovary syndrome.

## WHO QUALIFIES FOR SURGERY?

Patients between the ages of 18 and 65 years of age with a body mass index (BMI) score of 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or more could qualify for surgery. A BMI score of 35 kg/m<sup>2</sup> would also suffice if there are at least two comorbid conditions present which are recognised by the Medical Aids.

## SURGERY REQUIREMENTS

Before surgery can take place, the patient is evaluated extensively and treated by the team. Once supporting documentation is completed, the usual first port of call is the psychologist, followed by the specialist dietitian.

The psychologist's role in the initial phase is to evaluate the patient's functioning and background, and to possibly refer the patient for psychiatric treatment. A history is taken and, if necessary, psychometric testing can also be utilised. Family sessions are also an essential part of this process.

The dietitian evaluates the patient's dieting history, and initiates an eating plan which is specifically catered to the patient. This eating plan caters for the individual's cultural norms and

dietary preferences. The nutritional plan fosters some of the routines needed post-surgery, and is also essential to improving the patient's physical health and nutritional education.

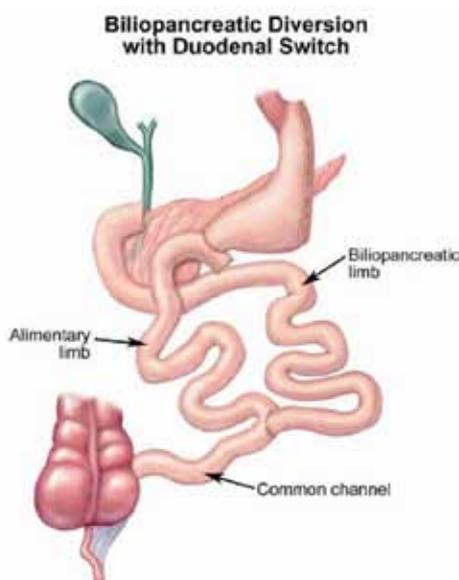
Once the psychologist and dietitian have been seen, the patient is seen by the specialist endocrinologist. A fully comprehensive evaluation is then done and a treatment protocol is established and initiated before eligibility for surgery is confirmed.

Prior to surgery, the patient meets with the surgeon, and various investigative tests are performed as prescribed by the specialist endocrinologist. These may include a gastroscopy, various relevant blood tests, a lung function and echocardiogram, among others. Many patients suffering obesity also suffer further illnesses they may not be aware of, such as sleep apnoea, diabetes, or hypertension, to name but a few. These need to be adequately treated and understood before surgery can be approved by the Centre.

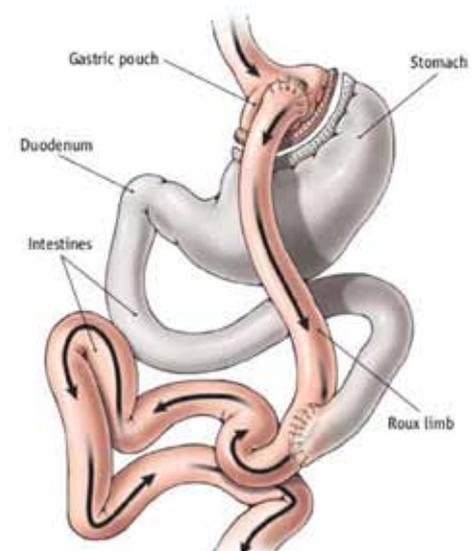
## MEDICAL AID SUPPORT

Various Medical Aid schemes fund the surgery, or part thereof. There are also health finance institutions that are willing to assist with the funding.

Medical Aid Schemes support Bariatric Surgery on condition that the surgery is performed in an accredited Centre by an accredited surgery team. Just as it would



Roux-en-Y  
Gastric Bypass  
will be conducted on  
patients with a  
BMI of 35 or more  
  
Biliopancreatic  
Diversion with  
Duodenal Switch (BPD)  
will be used  
for patients with a  
BMI of 50 or more



be reckless and irresponsible to build a home on weak foundations, it would be equally irresponsible to proceed with surgery without a responsibly-led and approved process of evaluation and treatment pre- and post-operatively. For this reason, a sound ethical history is required for a centre to be accredited. This is also to avoid fixed fee quotations, which invariably do not make allowances for individualised care and conditions, and can also lead to financial commitments which cannot be met.

### THE SURGERY

Two types of surgery are performed, namely the Roux-en-Y Gastric Bypass, and the Biliopancreatic Diversion with Duodenal Switch (BPD). Both of these are approved by The International Federation for The Surgery of Obesity and Metabolic Disorders (IFSO), and World Obesity, which are both international regulatory bodies to which the Waterfall Centre is registered.

The decision on which surgery is appropriate, is taken by Prof Van der Merwe and Dr Fetter, based on various physiologically-relevant factors.

It is important to note that surgery is just the beginning of an essential maintenance process that is integral to the attainment of the surgery goals and the desired outcomes.

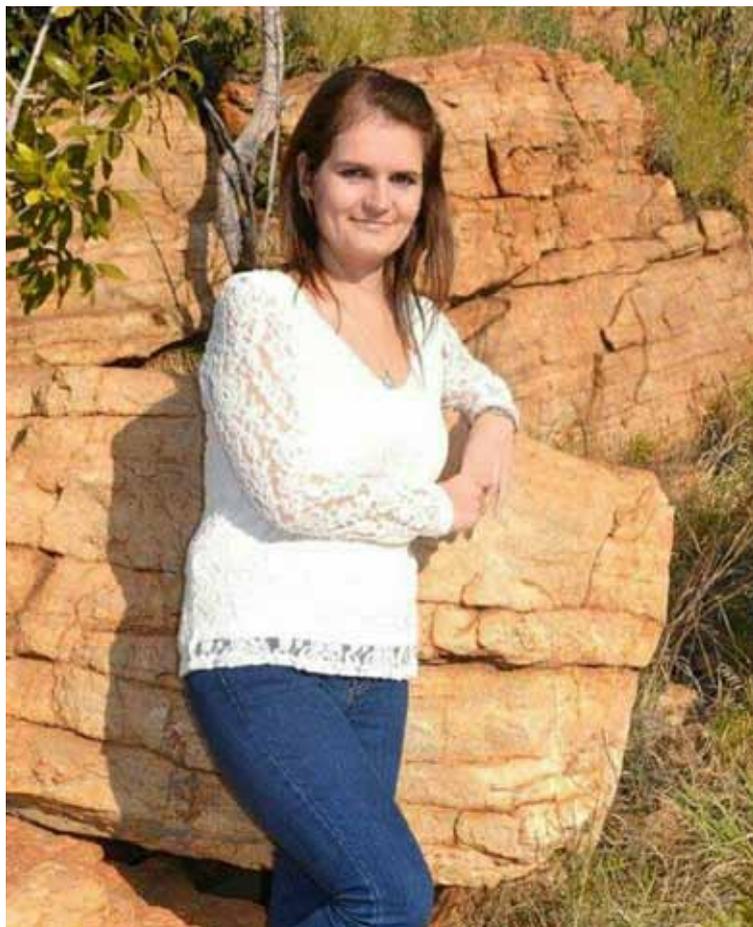
“OBESITY HAS BECOME THE MOST DEVASTATING DISEASE OF THIS CENTURY. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE TREAT IT WITH THE DIGNITY AND SCIENTIFIC CORRECTNESS THAT IT DESERVES. PATIENTS MUST BE GUARDED AND CAREFUL NOT TO STEP INTO THE TRAP OF TREATMENT STRATEGIES WITH EMPTY, EXPLOITATIVE PROMISES THAT WILL HAVE BEEN PERFECTED TO HONE IN ON THEIR VULNERABLE DESPERATION.”

– Prof Tess van der Merwe

### THE RESULTS



*Sarah-Jane - Before (June 2015)*



*Sarah-Jane - After (June 2016)*

### SARAH-JANE BRONKHORST'S STORY

Sarah-Jane had the BPD(L) surgery in June last year. Her weight has dropped by 54 kg and her dress size has dropped from a 22 to a 6. She is in excellent health and she follows the post-surgery programme to the letter.



Johann – Before (Dec 2014)



Johann – After (July 2016)

## JOHANN BECKER'S STORY

I tried every possible diet you can think of, entering the vicious cycle of losing and gaining weight. I joined a gym but before long I was back to my old habits. In 2013, I started to get nose bleeds and severe headaches. My blood pressure was at 155 over 95. Blood tests also revealed that my cholesterol levels had gone through the roof. I was immediately placed on chronic medication for these conditions.

November 2014 I weighed 120kg with a body fat percentage of well over 42%. My life changed on a Saturday morning in December 2014, when I watched a medical programme on SABC, featuring The Centre of Excellence for Metabolic Medicine and Surgery in South Africa (CEMMSSA) at Netcare Waterfall City Hospital, with Professor Tess van der Merwe talking about gastric by-pass surgery.

I decided to enter into their programme and had the Roux-en-Y procedure done. Thanks to the dedication of the dietician and psychologist, I finally understand my relationship with food and all other aspects of life.

My weight at the moment is 72kg, blood pressure is constant at around 110 over 65, my cholesterol levels came down to 2.1 and my body fat percentage dropped to 12%. I train with a professional coach at the gym, and am currently preparing to enter a Body Building Competition in the Transformation category in October 2016. I am bursting with self-confidence and my energy levels are higher than they have ever been. I have taken charge and ownership of my life – I made a solid commitment for life. I now live the life of my dreams and would recommend everybody who has tried every possible diet without success to consider this procedure. It has changed my life in all areas – physical, emotional and spiritual. “Know that this is not a quick fix. It is merely a wonderful tool that will help you to lose weight. You still need to do the work afterwards and put your health first at all times.”

## LOOKING FOR A WAY TO PAY FOR YOUR MEDICAL PROCEDURE?

First Health Finance (FHF) [www.fhf.co.za](http://www.fhf.co.za) is proud to be the first finance company in South Africa, specifically geared towards making all medical procedures affordable to all, by offering flexible and affordable payment plans.



Dean – Before (Dec 2014)



Dean – After (June 2016)

## DEAN ELIASOV'S STORY

In 2013 it all started... I was basically informed by my pulmonologist that I was a “time bomb” and “You won't see thirty five”. I started my research on what the options were. I can honestly say I have been to every dietician who at any stage was “the best”, I have also tried every diet fad. I didn't ever think I would be in this position if I had not had a friend who had a BPD earlier on. She was successfully operated on and has lost a large amount of weight.

How this started my journey to my new life... For any new patient who does not have any idea what is about to happen, it is daunting, but you feel better on the day you walk into the CEMMSSA centre in the Waterfall Hospital. Prof Tess and her team are with you every step of the way. With the immense knowledge and experience they project, there is no question they cannot answer and they truly offer full support throughout the process and afterwards.

Post my surgery my entire life has turned 360°. I cannot begin to thank Prof Tess, Dr Fetter and the Team enough for my new life and the healthier me. 