

Support Groups



Educating, Motivating and Celebrating *Weight-Loss Surgery Patients*

By Colleen Cook

From the “Do I have to go?” to the “I can’t wait until next month” attitude, feelings about bariatric support groups are as diverse as the groups themselves. At any one of the thousands of bariatric support group meetings held each month, you will find that those in attendance include:

- Weight-loss surgery investigators seeking information and the “real story”
- Anxious pre-op patients waiting for surgery
- Early post-op patients or “newbies”
- Long-term veteran patients checking in
- Back on trackers seeking to re-lose pounds
- Friends and family members
- Volunteers
- Professionals

Each person is there for a different reason, with different needs and doesn’t it make you wonder, “What is it that draws these people together? Why do they come?”

Our experience with thousands of weight-loss surgery patients and hundreds of support groups has provided us some valuable insight into why people attend support groups, how they are benefiting and why those who are not attending should. Here are just a few of the benefits that we identified:

Validation: From my own experience, I recall the weeks prior to my surgery were a time of great trepidation; a time full of questions.

For instance, I remember thinking:

- “Am I doing the right thing?”
- “Will I be ok?”
- “Will I succeed?”
- “Is it worth the risk?”

As many do, I turned to a bariatric support group to find not only answers to my practical questions, but also for validation for my decision to have weight-loss surgery. While each must find his or her answers to these questions and come to feel good about their choices, support groups can help provide insight, perspective and real world experiences from those who have been there and now are able to share their perspective.

Education: Quality support groups provide more than just social and emotional support. They provide a wonderful opportunity for learning. Some groups provide a more structured agenda, featuring scheduled topic presentations and discussions. Others enjoy participatory activities designed to reinforce key principles of success and help patients learn concepts sometimes difficult for lay people to grasp.

Many groups often invite guest speakers. Some are bariatric professionals like dietitians, psychologists and fitness instructors. Other guests provide presentations on topics like grooming, dating and cooking. All are designed to educate, inform and provide a well-rounded foundation of knowledge for long-term success.

Motivation: There is a wonderful story told of a young mother wanting to have her little boy learn to play the piano. He was taking lessons and she was just sure that he would become a famous pianist. She made arrangements for him to go to Carnegie Hall to see the Master Ignacy Paderewski play.

She dressed-up her son in his little suit and took him to the concert. They found their seats, settled down real close to the stage, and the mother turned around and saw a friend of hers and started talking. When she turned back around the little boy was gone, and she panicked immediately. “Where did he go? Oh, no!” Moments later, she noticed her son up on the stage, at the grand piano on Carnegie Hall, playing “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.” He had just learned the song. The audience was aghast – “Somebody stop him!” “That is awful!” “Somebody get him down from there!”

From the back of the room came the Master Ignacy Paderewski at a dead run, down through the aisle, up onto the stage, and behind the little boy. He began playing an accompanying melody to the little boy’s song and as he did, he encouraged, saying, “Don’t stop, keep going, you’re doing fine.”

As weight-loss surgery patients, we sometimes feel alone and misunderstood in the real world. It is so very important to surround ourselves with people who understand our decision to have weight-loss surgery and what it is like to deal with the many physical, emotional and relationship changes that we experience throughout our journey.

Support groups are a place to find people who provide

us with understanding, compassion and encouragement.

Celebration: As pounds come off, health is restored and dreams come true. It is a wonderful thing to have an opportunity to share successes with others. Support groups provide just such a place. Whether formally or informally, comments like these abound: “I am half the woman I used to be!” “I can cross my legs!” “They didn’t even recognize me!”

What an exciting time for weight-loss surgery patients. Support groups provide patients a time to share their success; to have a moment in the sun, to be queen or king of the prom, to graduate, or to receive a personal recognition for their achievement with a pin, photo or certificate.

Rededication: The first few years following weight-loss surgery are awesome, but there comes a time when we reach what I call, “the end of invincible.” It is not uncommon for patients to slip back into old habits, regain a few pounds and become discouraged. When and if that happens, support groups become an even more important connection to help stay focused, in control and successful. A monthly weigh-in or check-in at a support group meeting provides an important element of accountability and an opportunity to reconnect and rededicate ones self to long-term goals.

So, if you need to be educated, motivated, celebrated or rededicated, you will find it all at a quality support group meeting. For meetings in your area, refer to the International Support Group Registry online at www.bariatricsupportcenter.com, in WLS Lifestyles Magazine Publications, or on the OAC Web site at www.obesityaction.org.



About the Author:

Colleen Cook is a speaker, author and President of Bariatric Support Center International (BSCI), a company that specializes in providing long-term education and support for weight-loss surgery patients and professionals. For more information on BSCI or for the International Support Group Registry visit www.bariatricsupportcenter.com.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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