

M.D. NEWS

Special Feature

Healthy Weight Loss

Tidewater Bariatrics Gives Obese and Overweight Patients the Knowledge and Support They Need to Succeed

By Alison Johnson



PHOTO BY MARSHALL D. HOYLE

Dr. Margaret Gaglione, Medical Director of Tidewater Bariatrics, a practice dedicated exclusively to the medical treatment of overweight and obese patients.

To Dr. Margaret Gaglione, obesity is far more than a cosmetic concern. It's a disease — specifically, much like a cancer marked by unregulated growth of fat cells.

From Dr. Gaglione's perspective, it's clear that overweight and obese patients need intensive therapy and attention that primary care doctors often don't have time to provide. Tidewater Bariatrics, the Chesapeake practice where she serves as Medical Director, is dedicated exclusively to the medical treatment of overweight and obese patients.

The practice, modeled after successful university medical center programs, has one goal: changing people's eating and exercise habits for life.

"If you told somebody they had cancer, they wouldn't blink an eye at going through multiple weeks of therapy," said Dr. Gaglione, a board-certified internal medicine physician and bariatric specialist. "They'd be there every week for their appointment. It needs to be the same way for the effective treatment of obesity. It's a tremendous health risk and it makes people vulnerable to so many additional life-threatening diseases. You have to be very aggressive in treating it."

Tidewater Bariatrics opened in April 2007 at the corner of Kempsville Road and Volvo Parkway. Its staff of eight — Dr. Gaglione, health educators, nurses and administrative staff — offer a range of intensive behavioral weight-loss programs that stress low-calorie meal plans, patient accountability and physical activity.

Dr. Gaglione, a graduate of Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine, completed her residency in internal medicine at the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth. She is a Fellow of the American College of Physicians and an Associate Professor of Medicine at the Uniformed Services University. She has successfully completed her oral and written boards toward certification in bariatric medicine.

After a comprehensive history, physical exam, metabolic and cardiac assessment, Dr. Gaglione will tailor a program specific to individual needs, abilities and time constraints. As an experienced internist, she can monitor patients with diabetes and other chronic conditions as they work to lose weight safely.

One of the tools that Tidewater Bariatrics will use is the meal replacement program from Health Management Resources, or HMR®, a national health care company that specializes in weight loss and weight management.

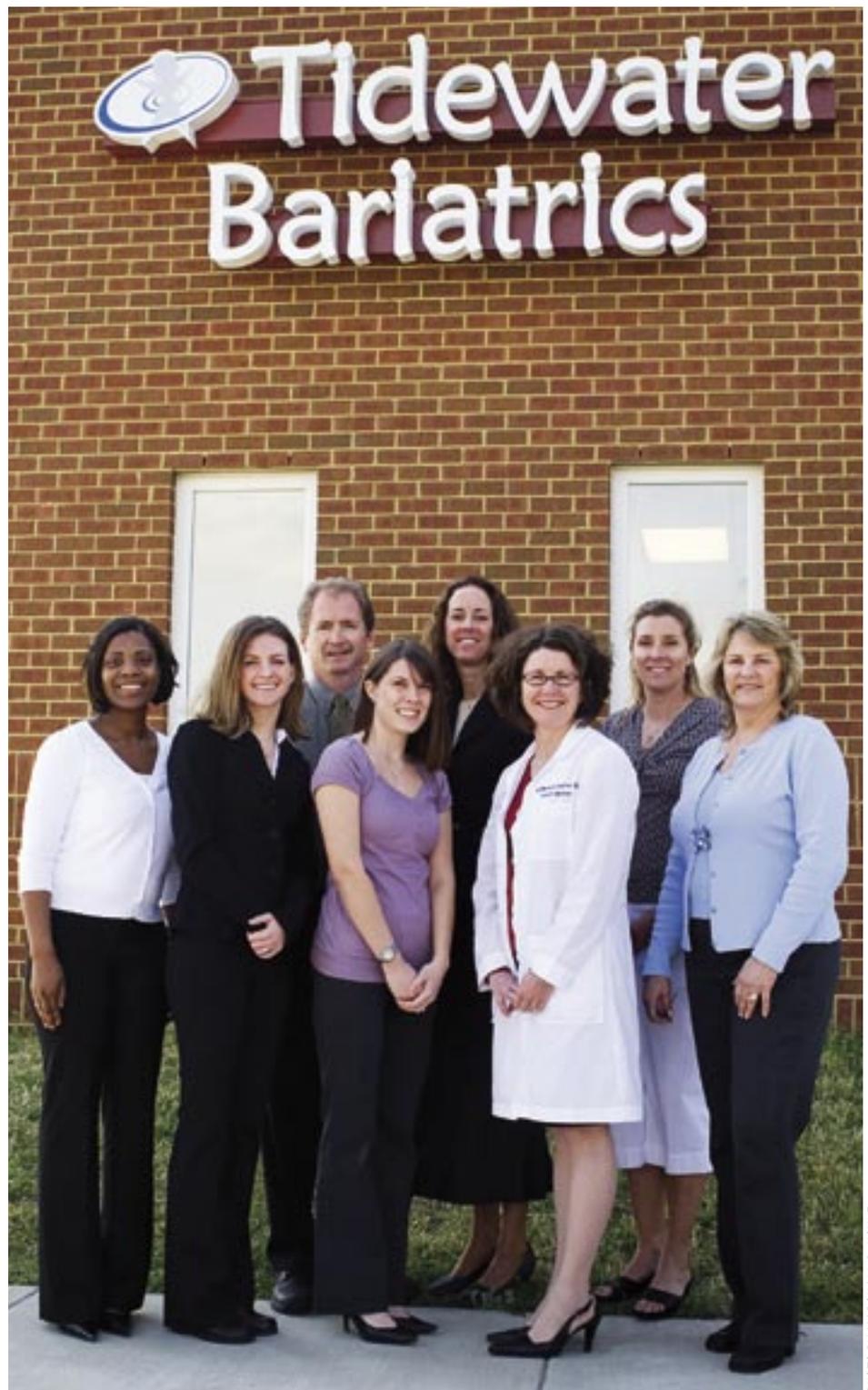
The HMR® Program for Weight Management at Tidewater Bariatrics keeps patients on a healthy and filling meal plan as they go through 16 weeks of one-on-one counseling and/or group classes. During that time, patients learn how to eat well — both at home and in restaurants — after they transition off the meal replacements.

All patients will receive extensive support, education and behavioral supervision throughout the weight loss, transition and maintenance phases of the program. The degree of medical supervision will be determined based on the patient's degree of obesity and medical history.

Proven successful in more than 55 published articles, the HMR® model is unique to Hampton Roads and is ideal for people looking to drop at least 30 to 50 pounds. The nearest similar programs are more than 100 miles away in northern and western areas of Virginia.

“What we do is remove the decision anxiety over what to eat until we can teach them how to do it right,” said Dr. Gaglione, a multiple-award winner for her dedication as a physician and teacher.

“Put another way, we make sure they lose weight safely while they're learning the nutrition and problem-solving skills they'll need to maintain their weight loss. We teach them to understand calories, ingredients, labels and different ways to prepare food. Even a basic awareness of these issues can make a huge difference, but we give them a detailed picture.”

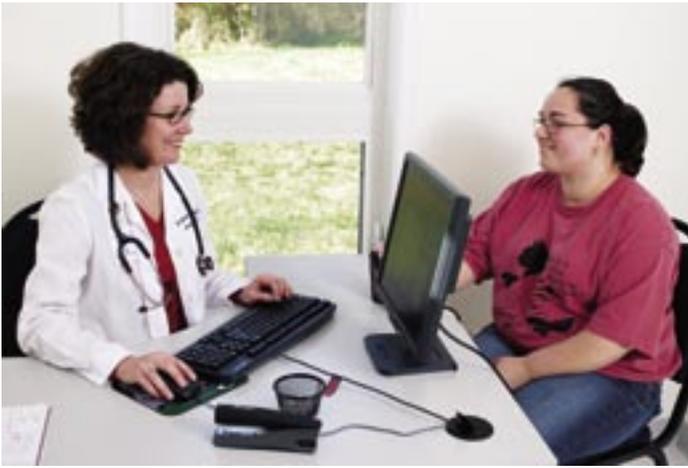


Tidewater Bariatrics (L-R): Adrian Hicks, Christy Van Dyke, David Collins, Stephanie Swider, Melissa Baldi, Margaret Gaglione, M.D., Tonya Deen, and Lee Ann Mandaleris.

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Other patients may choose a medically supervised treatment option that does not use meal replacements but has the patient choose to buy some or all of their own groceries using the Tidewater Bariatrics Food Guide. For all patients, accountability, record keeping and physical activity are required.

“You always have to look at the individual and his or her family,” Dr. Gaglione said. “So many successful people have a



After a comprehensive history, physical exam and metabolic assessment, Dr. Gaglione will tailor a program specific to the patient's needs.

difficult time with their weight. A lot of times, their problem is that they're on the move — in business, as a parent or with whatever groups they're involved in — that they eat out a lot or don't feel they have time to cook. So often they've heard, 'Don't do this, don't do that,' but they don't know what *to* do. That's where we come in."

A DANGEROUS PROBLEM

Nationally and locally, statistics on obesity are alarming. More than 66% of Americans are classified as overweight or obese. Between 1960 and 2000, men on average have gained 25 pounds and women have added 24 pounds.

While all age groups have expanding waistlines, the fastest-growing populations of obese patients are men over 60 and women ages 25 to 40. Many of those people are packing on the most dangerous kind of fat, the active visceral or abdominal fat cells that alter hormone levels in the body, trigger chronic inflammation in blood vessels and leave people at high risk of heart attack, stroke, diabetes and certain cancers.

"You can just look at photos in year-books and see the difference. Take a look at pictures from the 1970s, and pictures from this year's high school seniors ... the differences are staggering," Dr. Gaglione said.

Breaking what Dr. Gaglione considers an addiction to eating isn't easy. "You can tell somebody to stop smoking cigarettes or stop taking drugs, but you can't tell them to stop eating," she said. "Everybody needs to eat, and on top of that there are so many cultural traditions

involving food that are really ingrained in people's lives."

Hectic lifestyles and super-sized portion sizes have helped ruin many people's health. Rather than cook at home, families commonly buy seven to nine meals a week from fast food and chain restaurants. Children often eat dishes with 1,500 calories or more — the recommended intake for some adults for an entire day. A milkshake treat alone can cost more than 950 calories (to burn that off, a 150-pound person would need to walk 9.5 miles).

"If you can get people to record everything they're taking in and see all the extras, there's much more accountability," Dr. Gaglione said. "Usually they are shocked. Where a lot of doctors will only have time to say, 'exercise more, eat less,' we're going to tell people what that really means, raise their consciousness and give them the skills and education to follow the advice."

As Dr. Gaglione knows from her own past experience, primary care physicians, internists and specialists often have to curtail their discussion of obesity to focus on the secondary diseases caused by the patient's obesity, such as diabetes and hypertension. Tidewater Bariatrics is different because the focus is on the inciting disease, the patient's obesity.

As a fee-for-service provider, the practice will accept patients who refer themselves as well as those with a physician referral. The staff provide a bill that patients may submit to their insurance carriers if the therapy is covered, which Dr. Gaglione hopes will happen more in the future as the cost of obesity-related health care balloons.

Prices range according to patient needs after an initial free orientation class. Each patient enrolled in the HMR[®] program receives weekly educational classes, midweek phone support and medical supervision. As Dr. Gaglione points out, the average

Each patient enrolled in the HMR[®] program receives weekly educational classes, midweek phone support and medical supervision.





PHOTO COURTESY OF TIDEWATER BARIATRICS

Before (top) and 12 months after using HMR® Ultimate Diet. Lisa Bedy lost 110 pounds.

American spends \$100 a week on food already. More importantly, the potential long-term savings on medication, doctors' visits and hospitalizations is enormous.

The practice serves adults and teenagers. "The sooner we can get young people to change their habits, the healthier their future is going to be," Dr. Gaglione said.

The HMR® program is appropriate for teenagers, and the technologically savvy staff plans to create teen-friendly models of care such as Internet-based classes on nutrition.

SUCCESS STORIES

After 12 years as an internist — and plenty of time spent treating patients for often fatal organ complications linked to obesity — Dr. Gaglione considers it a gift to have ample time to focus on healthy weight loss.

Patients who lose weight typically see major physical and emotional payoffs. With even a 10% reduction in body weight, the initial goal at Tidewater Bariatrics, people can accomplish everything from improving their cardiovascular health and lung capacity to boosting their mobility and self-esteem.

One of Dr. Gaglione's diabetic patients who weighed 380 pounds dropped 17 pounds in five weeks, the equivalent of cutting

59,500 calories. His insulin decreased by 45 units and all of his sugars were between 80 and 130. Another lost about 70 pounds this year. Her obesity had interfered with her menstrual cycle but after she slimmed down, her periods resumed and she realized her dream of becoming pregnant.

As extra weight disappears, so often do symptoms such as irritability, low libido and sleep apnea. Dr. Gaglione estimates that 85% of her obese patients have the sleep disorder, which is disruptive at best and deadly at worst.

The solution for patients at Tidewater Bariatrics is straightforward, with no gimmicks attached: take in less energy in the form of calories, expend more energy in the form of exercise and let a caring team of weight-loss experts help you. "It all comes down to simple math and teamwork," Dr. Gaglione said.

For patients using the HMR® meal replacements, food choices include microwaveable entrees such as lasagna with meat sauce, turkey chili, barbecue chicken and five-bean casserole, all under 300 calories. Other offerings are low-fat shakes, puddings, chicken soup and bars that come in peanut butter, honey graham, blueberry and chocolate flavors.

All of the foods are nutritionally balanced to be low in simple carbohydrates and fat and plentiful in protein, and portions are a healthy size. Dr. Gaglione said, "According to published data, average weight loss on the meal replacements is 50 to 60 pounds, and many people drop more than 100 pounds."

As patients wean off meal replacement plans, Tidewater Bariatrics emphasizes adding plenty of fruits and vegetables. "Many people don't realize that they can eat healthfully and be satisfied," Dr. Gaglione said. A big bag of broccoli might hold just 120 calories, for example — 30 fewer calories than that little packet of butter.

"Volume is important," Dr. Gaglione said. "People need to feel full and that they're not denying themselves."

As Tidewater Bariatrics grows, Dr. Gaglione hopes her work can make a real impact on the community's health — and put smiles on the faces of people who have been frustrated by extra pounds for years.

"I love the difference we make," she said. "There's nothing in medicine as gratifying as that."



Tidewater Bariatrics

An Internist Specializing In Medical Weight Loss

To reach Tidewater Bariatrics, call (757) 644-6819 or send an e-mail to admin@twb4u.com. To read more about the practice, go to www.tidewaterbariatrics.com. The office is located at 1413 Kempsville Rd. in Chesapeake. ■