

Local weight-loss center began close to home

Photos and Story by Amy Bartlett

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From the color-coded medical charts to the private patient rooms at Monarch Medical Weight Loss Center in Florence, you can tell the emphasis is on the medical but with a lot of enthusiasm thrown in for good measure. Since its 2007 opening on Highway 101, the center has remained busy with local people who are determined to lose weight and keep it off.

Scattered throughout Oregon, the Monarch clinics are the brainchild of seven Oregon emergency medicine doctors and one nurse practitioner who decided they could put together a workable, medicine-based program that would do what they have asked their patients to do for many years — lose weight for better health.

“We were all working in the emergency room at McKenzie-Willamette (hospital in Springfield) “ One of our partners (Eric Spencer) struggled with weight loss for years,” says Rick Lindquist, M.D., clinical medical director of Monarch.

Spencer took a trip to California to try a weight loss program run by another physician, Raymond Powell. Spencer was so excited about his ability to lose weight that he returned to Oregon, his colleagues decided they would like to offer something locally.

“Powell’s program was the inspiration for ours,” says Lindquist, but he explains that Monarch’s program is not the same as Powell’s. The physicians modified some of it, did their own research and ended up with a plan that incorporates all the latest in weight-loss technology, prescription foods and maintenance.

They opened up a Eugene center and have recently branched out with more centers throughout Oregon.

“A lot of people benefit from our medical expertise,” says Lindquist, who regularly sees patients at the Florence center. “We know obesity has medical implications. We take the point of view that it is a chronic medical condition.”

Patients undergo an intake physical examination that includes a full health history and laboratory work, if needed. Lindquist explains that medical supervision is important during weight loss, particularly if a patient also has high blood pressure, a heart condition, diabetes or other medical problems. “We try to work with the patients and physicians. The high-tech scale at the center gives a lot more information than just your weight — most of us already know anyway — it also measures body composition, so you know how much under your skin is fat, lean and water. From that information, a computer spits out target weights and recommended caloric intake.

Prescription foods don’t sound like a lot of fun, but Lindquist explains that they help people in the beginning of the program to learn how much they should eat each day and to manage portion sizes. They offer an array of meal choices in addition to desserts and snack food. Some people choose not to use the foods or to eat regular food one to two days of the week. The patients usually transition into eating regular foods. Many of Lindquist’s patients are as enthusiastic as he is about the program.

“I had a really great visit today,” says patient Pat S., 65, of Florence.

Pat has been going to the center for three months and has already lost 24 pounds. Now her daughter and sister go to Monarch too, but in different Oregon towns.

She explains that what she likes is the education component. She says she now knows her body processes the food she eats, and how 5-7 mini meals per day that the doctors recommend work so much better than the traditional three meals a day. Help is always there too, either by phone or Monarch’s new Web site.

What about the social aspects of eating? No problem says Pat. It takes a little preplanning, but she has been on vacation with a friend and was able to stick with it.

“I just feel so much better. I actually have energy,” she says and adds, “this was the first Christmas in 25 years where I haven’t gained weight.”

The downside? “Sometimes I still want that hot fudge sundae,” she admits, “but I look so much better and feel so much better, it’s worth it.”

Mary Pohlman, 64, likes the maintenance aspect. She has lost 46 pounds since June (she started the program at Monarch’s Eugene location). “They work really close with me,” says Pohlman.

Lindquist says he enjoys what he does because its something he believes in.

“After years of medical practice, recommending diet and exercise and sending someone out the door, it's gratifying to offer people a program with medical supervision in a way that really works,” says Lindquist.