CONEMAUGH HEALTH SYSTEM

News Release

Contact: Francine Bodnar, Media/Special Events Coordinator

Phone: (814) 534-9610

Email: fbodnar@conemaugh.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Complication rates and costs for weight loss surgery declining

Johnstown, PA (June 16, 2009)- It's good news for obese Americans considering weight loss surgery. According to a recent study conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, entitled, *Recent Improvements in Bariatric Surgery Outcomes*, the average rate of complications resulting from weight loss or bariatric surgery declined 21 percent between 2002 and 2006, while payments to hospitals dropped 13 percent due to fewer readmissions.

"As with any surgery, there are going to be risks," says Bruce Duke, MD, FACS, general and bariatric surgeon, Conemaugh Valley Surgeons, who performs both gastric bypass and Lap-Band surgery. "But as surgeons continue to perform more of these operations and the technology becomes even more advanced, I believe we'll continue to see an overall reduction in the number of complications and costs, which will be beneficial to patients, physicians and hospitals."

According to the study, which compared complication rates of more than 9,500 patients under age 65 who underwent bariatric surgery at 652 hospitals, the declining complications and costs are attributed to the use of laparoscopy surgery technology, which is performed through very small incisions, the increased use of lap banding procedures and increased surgeon experience, as the number of bariatric surgeries being performed across the country continues to rise.

D'Arcy Duke, MD, FACS, a general and bariatric surgeon with Conemaugh Valley Surgeons who also offers Lap-Band laparoscopic surgery in addition to gastric bypass surgery, says, "With laparoscopic surgery we're able to use tiny incisions to gain access, which reduces the risk for complications such as post-surgical infections, so for those patients who are a candidate for Lap-Band, this can be a wonderful weight loss option."

In fact, the study notes that with the use of laparoscopy, a patient's odds of having complications was reduced by 30 percent and costs declined by 12 percent. With the use of banding, the costs were reduced even further, by 20 percent.

Additional Study Findings

- Complication rate among patients initially hospitalized for bariatric surgery declined from 24 to around 15 percent
- Post-surgical infection rates dropped 58 percent
- Readmission expenses, as a result of complications, fell from \$80,001 to \$69,960



PAGE 2- Bariatric Surgery Study

- The complication rates and costs declined, despite an increase in the percentage of older and sicker patients undergoing the operations during the study period.
- The proportion of those over age 50 undergoing the surgery increased from 28 to 44 percent The average of underlying illnesses experienced by the patients such as diabetes and high blood pressure more than doubled

Bariatric Surgery

Includes both gastric bypass and Lap-Band surgery. Lap-Band surgery is a procedure designed to increase weight loss by placing an adjustable band around the upper part of the stomach, which limits food intake. The band can be adjusted by a physician following surgery to help ensure the patient meets his or her weight loss goals. Benefits to minimally invasive Lap-Band surgery, which is reversible, include: no cutting or stapling of the stomach, a brief hospital stay and the band is adjusted without surgery. During Roux-En-Y Gastric Bypass, surgeons create a small pouch that permanently acts as the stomach and significantly reduces the amount of food a person can eat. The small intestine is realigned, so that food moves past the upper digestive system, reducing the number of calories the body absorbs.

For more information about bariatric surgery, contact Memorial Medical Center's Weight Management Center at 814-534-6470.

About Memorial Medical Center

Memorial Medical Center, the flagship hospital of the Conemaugh Health System, has been recognized with the HealthGrades 2009 Distinguished Hospital Award for Clinical Excellence. This ranks Memorial in the top 5% of all hospitals in the nation for overall clinical performance. For more information, visit www.conemaugh.org.