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Weight-loss surgeon uses experience to overcome complications

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EDGEWOOD - "Negative outcome" is a euphemism physicians don't like. It means a patient has died. But "negative outcomes" are part of the health care business. If a doctor treats patients long enough it's going to happen - it's hard to beat statistics.

But Dr. Dwayne Smith, a bariatric surgeon at Advanced Bariatric Centers in Edgewood, has beaten them so far. Since 2002, he has performed more than 600 weight loss surgeries - gastric bypass and recently lap band - with no "negative outcomes."

A negative outcome is defined as death within 30 days of the procedure.

ADVERTISEMENT He attributes his success to experience.

"I'm old," said Smith, 55. "I've done a lot of surgeries."

"An experienced surgeon will expect complications. I ask myself, 'can I identify the complication and treat it before it ends in a bad outcome?' And to spot those complications you have to spend time with your patients."

Stephanie Clifford, 33, had weight loss surgery four years ago. At 29, the Cincinnati Bell account executive weighed more than 300 pounds.

"Dr. Smith lays all the facts out with you. He's very honest and tells you the risk," said Clifford. "I still see him every year - actually he insists that he sees you once a year. Also, I can call his office at any time and he'll usually call me back and we'll talk about what's going on."

Clifford is 12 weeks pregnant and has gained only one pound during her first trimester. She said Smith is working closely with her other doctors and she has increased her visits to him.

Smith began the weight loss procedures when he was hiring a new doctor with that specialty. Smith began to take training to be able to help care for those patients.

"We began to mention to several hospital employees that when our new surgical recruit came to town that we would be able to do their requested gastric bypass procedures," said Smith.

Smith ended up not hiring the new doctor. He also learned that the hospital's health insurance was discontinuing coverage of the procedure.

"I had given my word that we would care for the patients, so we agreed to go ahead and do those first patients. They had good outcomes and the volume continued to grow from there."

To keep beating the "negative outcome" statistics and to meet the increasing demand for weight loss surgeries, Smith has brought on three partners.

"You check each other. You monitor each other's care. Working regularly with surgeons gives you a surgical conscience. That's what partners are good for."