



WESTERN BARIATRIC
INSTITUTE

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Local Man's Weight Loss Efforts Could Change the Future for Organ Transplant Patients

(Reno, NV) – Every day is a battle against time for 56 year old Carson City resident Michael Downey. Diagnosed with severe lung disease, Downey desperately needs a double lung transplant in order to continue his life. Unfortunately, there is one hurdle standing in the way of Downey receiving his much needed new lungs – he needs to lose 50 pounds, quickly.

What many people may not know is that in order for patients to qualify for a transplant, they must be at a healthy weight and Downey is 50 pounds over that. With time working against him, Downey's wife, Joni, suggested that he consider weight loss surgery. Joni is a successful gastric bypass patient and knew that it could help her husband meet his weight loss goals.

Downey turned to Dr. Kent Sasse with Western Bariatric Institute in Reno to help him lose the weight. Dr. Sasse, an experienced weight loss surgeon, knew that Downey's would be a difficult and high risk case. Due to Downey's current health, he has an increased risk of pneumonia and complications from anesthesia both during and after surgery. After discussing potential problems though, Downey felt that it was worth the risk to move forward with gastric banding surgery (also commonly called the Lap-Band®) because it would give him an opportunity to hopefully live a longer and healthier life.

Undergoing weight loss surgery prior to organ transplantation is a new approach and Dr. Sasse has been collaborating with Downey's pulmonologist, Dr. Jeffrey Golden, with the University of California, San Francisco Lung Transplant program, to determine the

appropriate steps for his care. Downey was referred to the UCSF transplant program by Dr. Guy Foster, a pulmonologist from Carson City.

“Michael’s case could really make a difference in the future for other transplant patients. Many people are told that they are not eligible for transplant surgery due to their weight. If we can help people to get to a healthy weight, which in turn makes them eligible for surgery, it could be a great breakthrough,” stated Dr. Sasse.

Downey underwent gastric banding surgery on Wednesday, October 3rd at Renown Regional Medical Center with Dr. Sasse. “I am definitely ready for this surgery and be one step closer to my lung transplant,” stated Downey.

After weight loss surgery, Downey will continue to prepare for the double lung transplant that he hopes to have in the near future. Once he has lost the excess weight, Downey will immediately be placed on the transplant list and then will wait for an appropriate donor. In the meantime, Downey and Joni are doing everything they can to prepare. “Our Jeep is packed and we are ready to go when the call comes in,” they said. That call could come 2 days, 2 weeks, 2 months or longer after being added to the registry but they will be ready when it happens.

In 2005, there were 27,527 organ transplants done in the United States. Once a patient has been determined eligible for a transplant, they are added to a national registry and organs are matched to recipients using several methods including blood type and the size of the organ needed.

When asked what he would say to others in a similar situation, Downey said, “Keep an open mind and seek out all possibilities. Had it not been for me suggesting the bariatric surgery for a rapid weight loss, I would have had no other option but to do a weight loss program the old conventional way and exercise is just not an option when you have severe lung disease.”

Downey has a PhD in Administration and Management and until recently was employed by Western Nevada College. He was the past state commander for the State of Nevada for Veterans of Foreign Wars and is also a Shrine Clown.

To schedule interviews with Michael Downey, Dr. Kent Sasse with Western Bariatric Institute, or Dr. Jeffrey Golden with the University of California, San Francisco Lung Transplant program, please contact Kim Brown at (775) 326-9171.