

A new collaboration between Respiratory Care Africa (RCA), The Innovative Surgery Fund (ISF), and The Obesity Community Fund based at Zuid-Afrikaans Hospital is taking a bold step to address South Africa's growing obesity crisis by making bariatric surgery more accessible and affordable.

November 27, 2024 - Four patients will undergo life-changing surgery at reduced costs, funded by these partners. This initiative not only aids patients but also fuels innovation in surgical techniques, research, and training for healthcare professionals. With over 20 million South Africans impacted by obesity, the project will expand in 2025, enhancing access to effective treatments and offering sustainable solutions for one of the nation's most significant health challenges.

Accessible Bariatric Surgery Offers Health and Hope to South Africans in Need

Innovative partnership lowers costs, broadening access to transformative bariatric surgery for millions affected by obesity in South Africa. Obesity and its related diseases have become some of the most costly and challenging health issues worldwide. In South Africa, a group of visionary healthcare providers, advocates, and patients are joining forces to combat this epidemic through an initiative focused on increasing access to bariatric surgery.

On November 27, four patients will undergo life-saving weight-loss surgeries at significantly reduced costs, thanks to a groundbreaking initiative aimed at reducing financial barriers while advancing medical research and training for bariatric surgeons. The program is set to expand in 2025, offering more patients access to surgery and enhancing healthcare professional training opportunities.

The Obesity Crisis: A Multi-Billion Rand Problem

Obesity is not merely a lifestyle issue; it is a complex medical condition that demands urgent intervention. Currently, 32% of South Africans live with obesity, a figure projected to reach 50% by 2030. With more than 20 million South Africans affected, less than 0.03% have access to bariatric surgery, a life-changing treatment option. Although lifestyle changes alone are successful in only 2% of cases, 80% of patients who undergo bariatric surgery maintain long-term weight loss. However, access is limited by high costs and a shortage of trained bariatric surgeons.

The Solution: Collaborative Innovation and Patient Advocacy

This initiative is spearheaded by five key partners, including RCA, ISF, and The Obesity Community Fund, who have come together to address this challenge. By funding surgeries, advancing research, and developing cost-effective bariatric techniques, they aim to make this transformative surgery accessible to more South Africans.

“As the Managing Director of RCA, it is both a privilege and a profound responsibility to support those in need of life-changing medical interventions. We are proud to sponsor four South Africans in their journey to undergo bariatric surgery—an essential step toward a healthier, fuller life that would otherwise be out of reach for them. Obesity is a serious health challenge in South

Africa, impacting not only individual lives but entire communities. Many face severe health complications that stem from obesity, including diabetes, heart disease, and limited mobility, yet often lack access to the resources necessary for effective treatment. By funding these surgeries, we are not only supporting these four patients but also underscoring the importance of making transformative healthcare accessible to more people across the country. This sponsorship reflects our commitment to improving lives through medical innovation and compassionate support. We believe that everyone deserves the opportunity to regain their health, mobility, and confidence, and we are honoured to play a role in making that possible for these patients. Our hope is that their stories will inspire greater awareness of the benefits of bariatric surgery and encourage more partnerships to make quality healthcare available to all who need it,” says Christiaan de Wet

“This project not only improves patient access to critical surgeries but also provides essential training for South African surgeons,” says Dr. Thinus Smit, founder of the Innovation in Surgery Foundation and a proctor for the South African Metabolic Medicine and Surgery Society (SAMMSS).

Supported by Zuid-Afrikaans Hospital, which has provided discounted surgical theatre rates, the initiative is based in a high-volume, multi-disciplinary bariatric care setting that delivers comprehensive support for patients dealing with obesity.

About the Partners:

Respiratory Care Africa (RCA): Be the desired partner to extend and enhance life by improving patient care through education and clinical support. RCA is committed to providing sustainable solutions that strive for the best bariatric care outcomes.

Innovative Surgery Fund (ISF): A non-profit committed to improving access to bariatric surgery and providing training and research opportunities for healthcare professionals.

Obesity Community Fund: A patient-led organization advocating for increased access to obesity treatment, supporting education, research, and fundraising initiatives to drive meaningful change.

“With the Obesity Community Fund, we’re creating a platform where patients can share their journeys, raise awareness, and contribute to a broader solution,” adds Dr. Smit.

Patient Success Stories:

Stories from patients benefiting from this program will soon be available. To arrange interviews or learn more, please contact Dani Davis.

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